Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

Year: 1977	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
January 2, 1977	"This Holy Ground"	Exodus 3: 5
January 9, 1977	"Don't Miss It!"	Matthew 2:11
January 16, 1977	"Something To Hold On To"	Isaiah 6: 1
January 23, 1977	"Where Do You Stand?"	Joshua 24: 15
January 30, 1977	Untitled	II Corintians 13
February 13, 1977	"A Christian As A Pioneer"	Luke 4:16 –19
MISSING February 20, 1977	""In All His Glory"	Mark 9: 2
MISSING February 27, 1977	"The Deadly Sins: Pride"	Luke 18: 10-ff
March 6, 1977	"The Deadly Sins: Envy"	I Peter 2: 1
March 13, 1977	"The Deadly Sins: Lust"	Romans 13: 11-
March 20, 1977	"The Deadly Sins: Gluttony"	Matthew 11: 19
March 27, 1977	"The Deadly Sins: Avarice"	I Timothy 1: 6
April 10, 1977	"To Live Triumphantly"	Ephesians 1:20
May 1, 1977	"The Sharp Edge of Life"	I Peter 2: 19-20
May 8, 1977 Pastor David Shaheen	"The Encouraging Word"	Ephesians 6: 4
May 15, 1977	"A Drama of Ruined Hopes"	Deuteronomy 34: 4
May 22, 1977	Enough By Which To Share"	John 6:1-
June 10-11, 1977	"Christ_The Gift To Give"	Matthew 22: 42
July 3, 1977	"To What End This Blessing?"	Psalm 67: 1-2
July 10, 1977	"On God's Terms"	Luke 9:62

1977- continued	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
July 17, 1977	"The Threat and The Promise Remain"	Galatians 6: 7
July 24, 1977	"God's Kind of Person"	Luke 10: 37
July 31, 1977	"You have It—~~OK~~ You Don't"	Psalm 37: 5
August 7, 1977	"To Learn To Pray"	Luke 11:1-
August 14, 1977	"Beyond Success"	Luke 12: 20
August 21, 1977	"Amid The Robberies of Life"	Judges 18: 24
August 28, 1977	"To A Nobler Use"	Exodus 38: 8
September 4, 1977	"On making The Most Of It"	Luke 5: 27-28
October 9, 1977	"Festival Of Praise"	
October 16, 1977	"On Being Impatient"	Deuteronomy 11:11
October 23, 1977	"The Festival of Faith"	Mark 10: 36-
October 30, 1977	"A Man Come From God"	John 1: 6
December 4, 1977	Key Words of Advent- "Repent"	Matthew 3: 1
December 11, 1977	Key Words of Advent-"Be Patient"	James 5: 7
December 18, 1977	Key Words of Advent- "Emmanuel"	Matthew 1: 23
December 24, 1977	"SURPRISE!"	John 1: 14

MISSING

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Second Sunday After Christmas — January 2, 1977

"THIS HOLY GROUND"

Exodus 3:5

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

It was in the beginning years of my ministry, as I served my first parish, when a knock came at the door of the room where I happened to be. The person who came to the door said, "There's a person in distress at the back of the church, Pastor. Would you come and talk with her?" Naturally I left what I was doing, and when I went to her I discovered she was a person I had never seen before, to the best of my knowledge. But she was in distress, alright, there was no question about it, and she was sobbing. With words that were scarcely audible — I was able to hear them with some effort — this is what I heard her say amid her sobs - - - "It's all so different....It's changed... ...it's not the same."

I tried to comfort her, but I don't think I did very well because when I looked at her I discovered in her eyes traces of hostility and bitterness, as though she were holding me personally responsible for the sadness of her situation.

Now in essence this is what the story was - - she belonged to that church in the days of her childhood and in her impressionable youth. Then, as life would have it for her, she left that community, and now she was returning. But when she went away she had high hopes, which now were unfulfilled. And she had dreams which had vanished away, and in the meantime she had experienced a nervous breakdown. Hoping perhaps to regain something that would hold her in good stead from the past, she had re-traced her steps to that church....and now, said the sobs - - "It's not the same! It's different! It's been changed."

And she was right. There had been a renovation program. The whole front of the church had been altered...new lighting fixtures had replaced the ones that had been there when she was there....the color of the walls was not the same that she had known when she worshipped there as a youngster. She was right, it was not the same. And she was discovering a cardinal principle of life and it was painful: nothing ever is as was.

When the Christmas greetings come to the Parsonage, we give earnest heed to them, because like as not they'll open the flood gate of precious memories. The postal mark -- we recognize the town from which it comes and immediately we see a face.....we read the signature, we read the brief message if one's incorporated, and we think of certain chapters in that person's life of which we've been part.

One of them came this year, as it had come before. This year her name was even changed, she had chosen another name for herself. And then it brought back that chapter in her life. I still have in my files the letter that she wrote . . . tragedy had struck her, she became a widow just like that! And the mother of four children. As I recall what she wrote in that letter, it went something like this: - - "It seemed to us as though we had been reaching for the stars, and they were within grasp . . . then that terrible night he was taken from me. I tried to put the pieces back together, Pastor. I've gone on a sentimental journey, that's what I did....I went back to visit the place where he proposed to me....I went back and stayed overnight in the town where we were married....I went back and re-traced our honeymoon....I went back to the place where our first child was born....I went back and stayed overnight where he was stationed . . . it's helped a little bit, Pastor."

.....but then the mournful lament: "But it's not the same! It's changed." She too was discovering, painfully, that nothing ever is as was. It's a cardinal rule of life.

The text for today's sermon goes all the way back to the Old Testament, the second book in the Bible, no less, the Book of the Exodus, the 3rd chapter, the 5th verse. But before I read the text I'll have to tell you a little bit about the person involved to whom the text is related.....one of the most remarkable people to be found anywhere in the pages of the Old Testament, a man named Moses.

As every Sunday School scholar knows, his life begins with his having been plucked from that little ark, that little boat, in the Nile River. And then he is taken into the home of the princess....he's given many advantages, he's looked upon with favor by Pharaoh himself, given a position of responsibility. But there's Jewish blood coursing through his veins, and Moses never forgot it. One day with that uncontrollable temper of his, he found a taskmaster dealing cruelly with a slave, a Jewish slave. Moses lays hold upon him, you see, and has done with him.

The deed is discovered...he has to run for his life, he turns his back upon Egypt. And now as we come upon this page in the Bible, he's in the land of Midian, taking care of his father-in-law's sheep, a rather monotonous task for Moses.....in strange contrast to the life to which he had been accustomed. And as he stands there musing, no doubt, he looks back to other days. He thinks of the past as having been brighter and better, the days that he knew -- prestigious days in Egypt. And all of a sudden a voice is heard -- now hear the words of the text:

> "Put the shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

It's the voice from Heaven coming to a man who seemingly has a backward look, who is thinking in terms of a brighter and better day that has come and gone. You'll notice how the text puts it: "The place whereon you stand - - " ...not where you stood ten years ago....not where you're going to stand a year from now or two years from not. But the place where you happen to be found <u>right now</u> -- this is

holy ground. This is the place where you can have an encounter with God. And no man ever has an encounter with God without finding all over again how God's purpose for his life is meant to be fulfilled in the here and the now.

Each of us runs the risk, of course he does, of painting the past with a gilded touch. It could well be that it's part of the obstacle course that some of us have to run when we reach the mid-point of our years. Yet it's not all bad, really, this thing of looking backward benighly - - but please, I beg you, don't do it at the risk of minimizing the high value that's to be placed on present possibilities.

I don't know why it is, but there's always the tendency to look back and to think that yesterday was better -- all other things being equal. It's true sometimes when we deal with the Bible. I thought during the other hour when we came here to worship at 9:45, the Sunday School rooms were considerably filled with children in particular, even as Sunday School sessions are being held right now - - - that when we teach Bible, if we don't watch out we keep God in the past tense -- we talk about the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob - - - we talk about the day of our Lord, and we think in terms of Nazareth, and Judea, and Galilee....long, long ago.

Well, this is right and this is proper, of course it is, and you know very well the premium that I place upon history. It's been my favorite subject. And poor indeed is that man who has no sense of history, who has no appreciation of it. It's meant to hold us in good stead. But we have to be very careful lest we allow ourselves to become imprisoned in the past! There is always the risk of thinking of God in the past tense -- the God who did those things. And you and I always run the risk of thinking they were giants in those days. Surely there were giants in those days, but they were giants with feet of clay, honestly they were. They had haloes, of course, but they fell every now and then, and when they picked them up they were twisted and torn a bit, and as

the years went on they became somewhat tattered - - - be careful how you gild the past, my friend, because the people who were there in the past were people as we are, with all of the fears and the frustrations with which we have to deal. It's a shameful thing to imprison God in the past. But that's the thing with which Moses had to deal at that very moment in which God gives him a jolt, and says, "The place where you're standing right now -- this is holy ground. This is the place of the encounter...this is the point from which you move onward -- not backward."

Now with all the strength that I can command I come to the Saint Luke pulpit on this day because I know very well that for some of us as we face 1977, we may do it with a measure of reluctance, because we keep thinking how wonderful it was back in the 50's -- the tranquillity of the Eisenhower years. If only we could go back! But nothing ever is as was.

I was reading last night an excellent little book -- I think it bears the title that goes something like this: "And Then God Created Grandparents." I think it required reading for every set of grandparents that I may know, pointing out the joys and the risks and the perils of those of us who are grandparents. One of the chapters, an exceedingly precious one, tells about a grandmother who was perceptive enough to think in terms of what the years would bring to her granddaughter, and then as other children came along. And she said to her husband, the grandfather now of about four or five youngsters, "Why don't you build each one of them a box, and then put their name on it -- it's their very own box. And we'll put it up in the attic, and then as the youngsters come to visit us, we'll say to each, they can go up in the attic and whatever they find there that they especially like, they can put it in their own box, and it can be theirs forever."

The grandparents tell how, as the years continued to pass, they went through adolescence, young adulthood and marriage, and they came back home.

And one of the very first things that they'd like to do was to go up into the attic, to check on their very own box -- coming back to something, you see, that they honestly believed was still the same! -- this earnest desire on the part of every one of us. And yet soberly they had to admit that while the box looked the same, the experience itself was not the same because the years had done something to their grandparents -- their grandparents had changed a bit. Could it be that one was in a wheelchair?....could it be that one could scarcely see or hear? And they themselves had changed -- they were not the same.

Nothing ever is as was. But thanks be to God, He's the God not only of the past, He's the God not only of the future, but He's the God of the present. Whenever you think of God, you think in terms of Eternity, and as you think of Eternity, never minimize the importance of the now past of Eternity.

In company with some of you I am happy to tell you that by the grace of God I am thrilled to anticipate 1977. I am grateful for what God has allowed in the past because I have lived long enough in my relationship with you, the people of this parish, to discover that there are those of you who do not imprison God in the past -- and who are absolutely committed to the precious truth that God is operative now, in the life of this parish, as He's never been operating before! -- and that everything that's happened before in our relationship together has brought us to the precious moment which is today! -- built upon what's happened before and a stepping-stone to what lies ahead. This I most certainly believe. Thank you for allowing me to share this measure of excitement.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Sunday after The Epiphany — January 9, 1977

"DON'T MISS IT!"

Matthew 2:11

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Of all the signs or billboards that one may find along the highways, there's one that remains in a class all by itself as far as I'm concerned. I think it to be a very clever one, although I didn't always think that way. It's the one that reads something like this -- you'll find it in a variety of adaptations: "OOPS - YOU MISSED IT! IT WAS BACK THERE A MILE AGO . . PERHAPS NEXT TIME YOU'LL STOP - - WE'LL STILL BE HERE --- WE'LL BE GLAD TO WELCOME YOU!"

It could be a place where merchandise is sold....it could be an antique shop....it could be an eating establishment. But the fact remains as one moved along the highway he didn't make the turn in time. And now, as he's passed the place, he's told he's missed it.

It's in that spirit that I come to this sacred desk this morning, to remind you, in these Sundays past Christmas, we do well to take a moment or two to reflect upon the fact that Christmas is over. Could it be, however, that we could have missed something regarding Christmas?

In all likelihood you've taken down your tree, you've packed away some of your trimmings for next year. You've assessed Christmas - - it's come and it's gone. You've thought something about it, of course you have.

You've thought about the fact that you were remembered. That's meant a great deal to each one of us, of course. We're always pleased when people say in advance, "What would you like to have?" I'm always grateful when Winifred drops some kind of a hint, because I do want to please her, and I'd like to have something for her that she'd like to have and that she'd welcome

receiving. As for myself, I'm always pleased when somebody is thoughtful enough to give me something that I especially want and otherwise might not have gotten. So as I look back over Christmas I'm thankful for what I did get.

And in all likelihood you look back over Christmas past and you think in terms of those whom you remembered especially, and when the gifts were being opened, the look of satisfaction on their face, to think that they were remembered by you, and that they got something very special because you cared enough to include them on your list. Yes, we take some time now to think about Christmas. It's come and it's gone, and we reflect upon the things that we got, and the things that we gave to other people.

But it just didn't happen, my friend, that today when you come to Saint Luke Church that we'd be singing the hymns that we're singing, that you'd be hearing the music that you're hearing. The hymns and the anthems reflect the basic elements of the Christmas story! - - and you're saying to yourself, of course you are, well Christmas is over, isn't it? It's past. Very wisely I suggest to you that we're doing what we're doing in this hour of divine worship, thinking again of Christmas, because there's the possibility that having gone through it we may have missed something.

I go back again and say, you got something for Christmas, didn't you?...I got something for Christmas. I go back again and say, you're pleased with the fact that you did remember certain people and they're happy that you did. But did you miss someone this past Christmas? It's a terrible thing, you know, to have Christmas come and Christmas go, and suddenly realize that you should have remembered this person or that person? We dread the thought that someone might have been forgotten. We're past - beyond it.....it's over. And someone was missed.

With all the strength that I can command I come to the sacred desk to re-

mind you that there's always the possibility that you may have missed Jesus Christ in Christmas. Christmas is the birthday of Jesus Christ! And we may have given so much heed to other things that we forgot Him. And it's only as we get past Christmas that we look back and take ourselves to task.

Before I became your Pastor, when I shepherded a congregation in Pennsylvania, they had a very lovely chapel known as the Chapel of The Good Shepherd. It was beautifully done, and had a very special place in the hearts of children. In fact, every Sunday morning we had there a special children's service -- we called it Children's Church. They had their own deacons, they had their own ushers, they had their own alter guild, they had their own worship leader, they had their own offering envelopes. It was a very precious place to children.

And I remember the day after Christmas going into the Chapel of the Good Shepherd and finding there something that I think I still have in my files. As soon as I looked at it I thought to myself, why, that looks like a birthday card. And when I opened the envelope, that's exactly what it was, and it said: "Happy Birthday, Dear Jesus".....and inside was a dollar bill. The Good Book says a child shall lead them, and that has left a mark indelibly upon the fabric of my heart -- a childish remembrance that Christmas is the birthday of Jesus Christ. And while she may have thought of the gifts that she received and while she may have thought of the gifts that she gave (I'm inclined to think it was a little girl....why are we always quick to think that girls are more spiritually sensitive than boys?....why are we inclined to think that women are more spiritually sensitive than men? It may be an error to think that, of course. No one sex has a monopoly upon spiritual sensitivity).....but it did look like a little girl's writing. And God be thanked for the fact that when she thought of Christmas she happened to remember Jesus Christ.

And so as I come to the sacred desk this morning I'm asking you, when

you look back - - are you sure you didn't miss Him? It's over. Was He included?

Preachers delight in telling this story. I'll share it with you — I may have told it to you before. They were making much of the production, the dramatic production on the night that marked the Holy Nativity. Some churches do that, you know, they put on a Christmas pageant. This one was to be a very special one. The director said, "This year we'll do something we haven't done before - - all the lights in the auditorium will go off, and then in a very dramatic way we'll focus lights upon the Baby Jesus, and in this way we'll emphasize the fact that nothing is as important as the centrality of Jesus Christ." To make certain that it would go off as he wanted it to go off, he told the person in charge of the lights, "You have that special light burning as all the other lights are burning, but then you turn off all the other lights and then that one special light will remain. You understand?"

...of course he understood, and he had it. But for some reason when the night came he fouled himself up, and all the lights went off.....and a voice was heard from off-stage — a stage whisper that's loud so that all the people could hear it: "Hey, you — you switched off that light on Jesus! — get it back on!" And maybe that's what we have to do. We've got to get that light back on Jesus Christ. We've got to remember again and again and again that there can be no meaning regarding Christmas unless Jesus Christ is pre-eminent. The Apostle Paul, that great Christian, that ardent follower of Christ, looked back, and when he thought of Jesus Christ he said of Him - - "In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell." And the Creed writers say: "Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father" - - this is God come to us.

Now on this Sunday, one of the Sundays after Christmas, Christmas past, are you sure you didn't miss Him? Are you sure you saw Him?

People who travel to distant places come back and compare notes. They tell about what they saw and where they went. And in the presence of some of those people I've heard them lament and say, "Gee, we missed that!" Let me read for you the text for today's meditation:

> "And when they (the wise men) were come into the house they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshiped him. And when they had opened their treasures they presented him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."

The indictment remains - - at the end of a journey called Christmas, where did it end for you? With a measure of delight in what you got? In a measure of delight in what you gave somebody else? Is there anyone of us who can honestly say to himself, I know a measure of delight because of what I especially gave this year to Jesus Christ - - which I specifically labeled with his name, and said: "Jesus Christ, this is for you"? It could well be that the expression of your devotion and compassionate concern for somebody else would pass as a gift for Himself as long as it was done in His mind and in His ppirit. But there again I'm constrained to ask you: the things that we've done for others — did we really do it according to the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ? Still as of old these words remain: "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, and you've done it in my name, then you've done it in my spirit - - it's just as though you had done it for me". So draw some measure of comfort, if you don't mind, in the realization that whenever a gift was given in the spirit of Jesus Christ it might just as well have had the name of Jesus Christ upon it. Think about that.

Now let me go back and read for you what you ordinarily associate with Christmas Eve, and yet you've got to remember that it was after the birth of the Baby, some time afterward that the wise man finally arrived, and then gave him what they did:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "in Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet:

'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of
Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who
will govern my people Israel.'"

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."

But the story doesn't end at that point. Listen to this:

" . . . And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way . . "

...a different way. They went back differently. They hadn't missed it. They found something that had touched their lives. And they were not the same. What difference has set in your life, because you made a journey called Christmas? You didn't miss it, did you?

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Meditation - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Second Sunday After the Epiphany January 16, 1977

"SOMETHING TO HOLD ON TO"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The sermon on this day of necessity is a brief one. It bears the title: "Something To Hold On To." And the text is from the prophecy of Isaiah, the sixth chapter, the 1st verse:

> "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne,
> high and lifted up . . . "

Now, that is not a fair thing that I've just done for you. I've read only a part of that great verse of Scripture that serves as the basis for this sermon on Anniversary Sunday. Let me go back for you now and read the seven introductory words which ought never to be separated from the remaining part of the text:

> "In the year that King Uzziah died, I
> saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne,
> high and lifted up."

A thing is never to be fully appreciated until it's seen against its background. That's why this text can never be read partially. If I read it for you partially this morning, I did it by deliberate design, that you might understand that the text must stand in its entirety - - "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up."

You see, that grand and good man, that rare and remarkable spirit, Isaiah by name, had been pretty well bowled over by the death of a great man. It was as though his own world had tumbled in on him. The dead king, while he lived, had provided good and effective leadership. His own people fared exceptionally well against the military and political alliances that had been arrayed against them from without. Even as he began to wane, in his declining years, they still looked upon him as a beloved sovereign, and no one said that his rule was ineff-

fective. But now Uzziah was dead.

In his stead came a weak one, a king named Ahab, who bartered the independence of his country, who sold out his people and opted for security and peace with the Assyrian emperor. All this was so debilitating. But against all this the prophet saw a vision. His king was dead. But high and lifted up he saw the Lord, seated upon a throne.

On this Anniversary Sunday - - really now it's not too much to suggest that's the way it was, or something like it, when that eccentric but totally committed Milton J. Bieber, a mission developer for the United Lutheran Church, loomed on the horizon and came upon the Silver Spring scene. It was back in the fall of 1939 . . . . . 1939 -- some of us remember and remember it well, and our mood and our manner was caught up in the classic expression as Sir Edward Gray put it, the Britisher who looked out from where he was upon the European scene, and said ever so painfully: "The lights of Europe are going out, one by one, and I do not think that I shall live to see them go on again." - - - it was at <u>that</u> time that Milton J. Bieber came and said, "Let there be established a group of people, let's form a brand new congregation." Dreams were being shattered....hopes were not easily kept alive. But Bieber said, "Let's establish an oasis of courage and confidence in the purposes of God - - let's do it! - - let's do it here!"

And so I stand at this sacred desk this morning telling you in cryptical fashion that that is the way it was. That's the way it is. And by the grace of God, it may always be that way.

From my vantage-point as your Pastor as I look out over this congregation each Lord's Day, I see some of you and I see you against the background from which you have come. Here and there, if I could make you privy to the things that I know, I could point out this person and that person, who has marked the path that leads to this place because <u>his</u> world has tumbled in -- the dark night of the soul has come upon him, the lights are going out, one by one.

And he wonders if they'll ever go on again. It's not simply the light of the world that's become dim, but it's the flickering, faltering light in his own soul....

..Thirty-seven years have come and gone and people have marked the path that led to an altar -- whether it be in the Silver Theatre, or in another borrowed place, the Masonic Temple -- until they could come to this intersection at Colesville Road and Highland Drive, to a place that they could call home.....always each Lord's Day to see anew the vision of the Eternal God, high and lifted up - - something to which they could hold on to and something which would hold on to them, and never release them.

That's what we are, you see, the people claimed by a vision -- inspired -- encouraged by that vision to be His obedient servants in a wicked world.

The years have come and the years pass -- thirty-seven of them, and throughout this time to this present this congregation exists in order to hold before the gathered company the vision of God high and lifted up. And my debt is very great to those men of God who came on the scene before me. I know something of <u>their</u> commitment, and their only purpose was to exalt before you the Lord Jesus Christ, to lay His claim upon your soul.

Well, this God with whom we must do business is the God of history and eventually we must recognize that. And what does that mean? It means, among other things, the grim yet glorious realization that God keeps His own grip on the world, no matter how hell-bent it may become. Soon or late the fact-of-facts is revealed -- the pure...the true....the good and the beautiful remain, they survive. And God's purposes will be fulfilled.

To that end I come to this sacred desk today, I commit myself anew with you to whatever years God may give us together, that we may be claimed by that vision. He's high - - He's lifted up - - His claim remains upon us. May we live and labor in love as His obedient servants.

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(Transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Sheheen
The Third Sunday After The Epiphany January 23, 1977

"WHERE DO YOU STAND?"

Joshua 24:15

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

A few years ago when the Rev. Dr. Robert James Marshall was elected by clear and decisive ballot to become the President of the Lutheran Church in America, a colleague of his on the Executive Council was seated nearby. He quickly, let it be said thoughtfully, wrote a message and placed it in Dr. Marshall's hands. As Dr. Marshall was called to the podium to acknowledge his election, he read that message. These were the words: "Just as you now are called to serve as the Chief Pastor and Shepherd of our souls, even so all of us are called to serve with you and to support you." Those words remain in my mind as I come to this sacred desk on this Sunday nearest the Inauguration of a national leader.

You can understand why, that I set aside the sermon that I planned to preach today, for I with you watched the festivities of the Inaugural event, and I dare say with you I was deeply moved. As magnificent, as generous as anything, our new President acknowledged the debt that all of us owe to his predecessor, recognizing him for the reconciling influence that he brought to bear upon us as a nation. In company with you I, too, was impressed when I saw him place his hand upon the Bible, exalted in front of us the Good Book, upon which he made his promise.

As I reflected upon this it occurred to me that all of our eyes were focused upon one man, the eyes of the nation were turned on him. It was his day. We didn't want to lose a single glimpse of where he was, what he was doing. And very properly the focus remained on him.

There is a text for today's meditation, a passage of Scripture that's made irresistable claim upon the fabric of my thinking. For there was another moment, a great moment, in a great chapter that was being written by a great nation on the face of the earth. Their Leader stood up in front of them. He said something, and his words were directed to them. Let me read the text for you now -- it's the 15th verse of the 24th chapter of the Book of Joshua, and the words are the words of Joshua. Said he:

"Choose you, this day, whom you will serve."

In that great moment in their history he had made it a matter of record as to where he stood, and that's exactly what we have been looking for in the man that we chose to be our President. Whether we voted for him or not is beside the point. But it is essential that he let us know the direction in which he is going to move. It may be too much to ask him to spell out for us all of our programs, but we do want to know his basic philosophy. We are encouraged that he subscribes to basic morality, to ethics. But I say to you now as I stand at this sacred desk, it is not enough that our eyes should turn on him and we should say, "We want to hear where you stand -- we want to know in what direction you're going to move" . . . . because I'm willing to submit to you this morning that to all intents and purposes when you speak about ethics and morality, our leaders become pretty much what we want them to become, or what we allow them to become. You won't forget that, will you?

There's a highly esteemed member of this congregation with whom I used to speak a great deal about things on Capitol Hill, and as he surveyed that scene he used to say to me, "But Pastor, remember, the elected representative pretty much reflect the mentality and the morality of the area from which he comes." You may not like to think of that, but after all we do call them our elected representatives. We are the ones who do choose them.

There are some encouraging things on the national scene, I am happy to

tell you. We're beginning to think in terms of religion -- would you believe it! We talk about healing, we talk about reconciling influences....we talk about putting certain things behind us....we talk about the admission of guilt, we talk about pardon and amnesty, which is simply to suggest forgiveness. We think about moving ahead. These are religious terms. That's a very salutary thing, I suggest to you. But no one person by himself can transform a national scene.

We had for a time, and I succumbed to it briefly, until I remembered that I'm a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ - - to a degree of cynicism and despair - - who's to be trusted? Who's to be believed? These past years have been a jolting experience for me, as some of you know, and know very well. Some of us have watched with a great deal of pleasure and profit: "Upstairs, Downstairs" - - our British cousins have produced it for us.....the two levels, you see. The people who live upstairs....the people, the serving class, who live downstairs. Their lives parallel to a degree. And then we discover one day, as we watched the series, that the sins that they commit are common sins ....the folks upstairs and the folks downstairs, no matter what it is that separates them culturally or economically or socially, their sins are the same.

Now you and I need to remember that lest we succumb to a measure of cynicism and despair. When those in high places had their excesses of misbehavior, we began to cry out. And sometimes people cried out because they were infuriated that they could do it at our expense, and spend our money for their wicked ways. But God help us if that's the only reason why we express a measure of moral outrage.

Now let me tell you that when my eye was focused on the new national leader, it occurred to me, wouldn't it be something if when he stepped out of the picture, every single one of us stepped into the picture. For it has to be a

matter of record now as to where we stand. Even as Joshua of old, as he was leading the children of Israel, that nation in formation, stood up and said exactly where he stood. Then he turned to them and he said, "And where do you stand?" - - this is what you and I have to remember, you see. You'll find this parody amusing, perhaps, amusing only to a degree. There was a man who once said to his pastor, "I wish that the Government would get its foot off my neck, its hand out of my pocket, its eyes off of my private life, and stop interfering with me." He had been fed up with bureaucracy. Did it ever occur to you that to all intents and purposes this becomes a necessary evil because there are those of us who just aren't honest enough. The Internal Revenue Service has to do what it does because some of us don't know how to count when it comes to filling out an Income Tax form - - they have to do what they do because some people would defraud us...as they have. When somebody dies, we have to get -- what is it, a dozen now? of death certificates because there are people who will take advantage of those who are left alone after someone dies. The evil is not perhaps in bureaucracy. The evil lies within us that such rules and regulations are necessitated. Said Joshua, "This is where I stand. This is the direction in which I am going to move. In the whole new climate that surrounds us, for which we give thanks to God, a national leader has said, "This is where I stand - - this is the direction in which I am going to move."

But that's not enough. I honestly believe that God holds America responsible as a nation, just as He holds an individual responsible as a person. And I honestly believe, just as God has a purpose for your life, so God has a purpose for America. And I know something else. That unless we subscribe to God's way of resolving our problems, as individuals we come upon hard and difficult times, and if America thinks she can run her course by ignoring God, then she too will come upon a sad and difficult day. Said Joshua -- now, you choose...now, you

decide.

Take your eye now, for the moment, off of Pennsylvania Avenue. No longer focus upon 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue or Capitol Hill. Lookin the mirror. Where do you stand? Therein may lie the answer.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A CHRISTIAN AS A PIONEER"

Luke 4:16-19

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Soaring some seven miles over the surface of the earth as our DC10 winged us homeward, our Associate Pastor turned toward me and placed in the palm of my hand a little book. He said, "Read it -- you can do it in less than half an hour." With the high regard for the value that he places upon such things, I did not waste any time. I read it at once.

The book has not been off the press very long. It had been written by a great man of God who has come to be something of a choice spirit in the life of Pastor David. He is the Rev. Dr. Alvin Rogness, recently retired as the President of Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. The book bears the interesting title: "Remember The Promises." It's a series of little gems, a page or two in length.

One of his sentences, pregnant in meaning, caught my eye and still claims it. It reads like this: "A remarkable thing about man is that he is capable of doing what's never been done before." -- a very simple statement, but profound in meaning: "A remarkable thing about man is that he is capable of doing what hasn't been done before!"

It triggered all kinds of thoughts in my mind.....

-- Wilbur and Orville Wright...how readily I would think of them since I was where I was...Wilbur and Orville Wright, they did what had never been done before, they gave man wings.....

-- the light that came upon the book, that I could read it very easily -- Thomas Edison, whose giant step forward put light where there had been darkness.....

— Marconi, who transmitted sound across great distances, where otherwise there would have been silence — who brought the distant near.....

— and in that cabin in the sky, a veritable room with wings — imagine, we had every comfort and every convenience of home. And all because at this time or that time, this person or that person was able to do something that had never been done before.

And then my mind went back, to the Holy Land, where we had taken the pilgrimage. And I thought particularly of that town in Nazareth, where Jesus grew up as a boy. We walked where He had walked.

Anyone who travels to the Holy Land needs, I think, at least two things in his personal equipment: he should have a fund of Biblical knowledge, he should be aware of Biblical history, what it was that took place, and where, and when, and the personalities involved.....and in addition to that he ought to have the gift of a sanctified imagination. For what good is it to say that you walked where Jesus walked if you're not able to picture what it might have been when He was there. You won't misunderstand me, will you, when I tell you that I asked God to give me a sanctified imagination when we stood in <u>this</u> place, and went to <u>that</u> spot, and recalled this event or that incident? And now, in that cabin in the sky, a veritable room with wings, with that thought so pregnant in my mind, - - - it's within the capability of man to do what had never been done before.

I thought of Jesus in Nazareth.....I thought of the time He went to the synagogue. Well, why don't you let me read that page from the Bible for you. It's recorded as the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, verses 16 to 19:

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read: and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach
good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release
to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the
Lord." . . . .

....we were there, where this is supposed to have taken place.

We saw Nazareth, other things as well.

We saw the village well, at least they pointed in the direction where it was.....the spot where the carpenter shop is supposed to have been.....and in my judgment the most beautiful of all the churches that we saw, recently constructed, the Church of the Annunciation, built on the site where presumably the angel came and told Mary that she was to become the mother of our Blessed Lord.

But when we turned our back on Nazareth and drove down the road a little bit, the bus driver was kind enough to stop, and then we got out, some of us, and then we looked back to Nazareth, built on a hill, and there on the edge of town is the great hill, with its precipice.....and then my imagination would take over.....

. . I thought I heard a woman saying, Mary by name,

"Joseph, where do you suppose he is now?"

(Let's say He was ten years of age...olive-skinned, dark eyes, dark-haired, one of a number of boys in Nazareth)

...Mary saying to the father, "Where do you suppose he is now?"

...and then Mary answering her own question: "I think I know where he is -- he's probably gone back to the same place. I

caught him there once myself, at the edge of town, looking down over the precipice into the great valley...and when I looked at him he was lying flat on his belly...he had a blade of wheat and he was putting it back and forth between his lips.....but his eyes, they were seeing things far away, and he was thinking deep thoughts, Joseph. I think he's gone back there again . . . "

And what did He see?

He saw the camel caravans, that's what He saw -- bringing their merchandise to the market-place....

He saw the beggars by the side of the road, the diseased, the hurt, the disadvantaged....

He saw the prisoners being marched off so that they would rot in jail....

These were the things that He saw.

And as a child He had deep thoughts, honestly He did. You remember, He's the one who at the age of twelve went to the temple, put the learned men on the spot by asking them deep questions, the big questions. He was so different.

The child became a man, as as a man He left Nazareth and went around preaching and teaching and performing miracles. And then He came back, as His custom was -- that's the way the Bible says -- to the synagogue. Now visualize it, won't you? - - the man in charge, the Elder, spots Jesus in the congregation. He remembers what they had said about Jesus, the local-boy-who-had-made-good. His reputation, you see, had come back and they'd heard all these grand and good things about their man from Nazareth. And so naturally when it came time to read the Lessons, he suggested Jesus - - "If you don't mind, why don't you honor us by reading the Lesson today?" And then Jesus very reverently went over where the sacred writings were kept, unrolled the scroll, and He read what I've already read for you.

And then He said something - - because it's within the capability of man

to do something that's never been done before, this Jesus said: "Today this Scripture is going to be fulfilled -- it's going to become alive -- something's going to be done about the imprisoned....something's going to be done about the diseased....something's going to be done about the hurt of humanity. God's going to invade this world. The problems are going to be resolved from God's point of view -- and I'm going to be that person. . . ."

...It's within the capability of man, I tell you, the remarkable thing about man to be able to do what's never been done before....

The world has never been the same since Jesus Christ left Nazareth. There's been all kind of healing let loose in this world ... there's been all kind of prison reform let loose in this world....there's been all kinds of meeting the need of humanity, the like of which the world has never known before.....there's been enlightenment...there's been education....there's been healing. To put it in one sentence -- God has been let loose in the world that belongs to Him, because one day on a hill outside of Nazareth someone dared to believe that He could do something that had never been done before.

Said He, it's a brand new commandment I give you -- "Love one another." What is unique about the life of Jesus Christ? The complete and perfect identification with God, His willingness to become God's obedient servant, so much so that the Creed writer has put it in classic fashion: "Very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father . . . " The remarkable thing about the human spirit: Man is capable of doing what has never been done before.

How could you sit idly down and watch the dramatization called "Roots" without saying to yourself as you walked away -- it really was that way at one time -- is this the way we treated human values? -- is this the way we denied the human spirit? The remarkable thing about man: he has the capability of doing what has never been done before! . . . and we learn to exalt human rights, and place a high value upon an individual.

Our other son, Jon, every now and then used to send me clippings from the New Yorker or some other magazine that he knew that I didn't get. I told you about the one, didn't I, the clipping of the bedraggled kind of chap who stands outside the church door and reads what's on the church bulletin board:

"A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE YOU, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

...and the bedraggled fellow scratches his head and says, "Isn't it a pity that the idea never really caught on!" That carpenter's son tried to break through, to let God loose in this world as it had never been done before, because it's within the capability of man to do what's never been done before.

And that is, I presume, was the impression of impressions that was made upon the fabric of my heart as I made the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, to realize that there and then, at one time, there was one person who did what had never been done before -- willful, perfect obedience to a Heavenly Father.

You know, don't you, that it's within your capability, too. You are unique. In God's plan you're meant to do what's never been done before. That's why He justifies your existence, whether you justify it that way or not.

We stood in many places, as you might know, in the Holy Land. I remember so well as the Gospel Lesson was being read this morning, of going with that little company, and Pastor David was given the privilege of reading for the entire group the words that you heard read this morning -- on the spot presumably where those words were first spoken by Jesus Christ. We went to the "Our Father" Church -- where presumably the spot remains to this day where Jesus first taught disciples to pray.....we stood within the shadow of the Mount of the Ascension, where this Man who had done what had never been done before gave a parting command to a group of disciples, and as much as to say to them, "Now you go, and you do what's never been done before.....you go...preach...teach...minister to the disadvantaged, body and soul, mind and spirit.

Preachers love to tell this story, and I am no exception. There's supposed to have been the dream of St. Peter. He saw Jesus going away from the world,

and Peter said, "You can't go yet. You just began to do what you started to do! You can't go yet!" And Jesus said, "I'm going -- I'm returning to my Heavenly home." And then Peter, perceptive as he was, immediately asked, "Well then, what's going to happen to what you started?"

.....and Jesus answered, "I'm counting on my disciples."

and Peter said, "Suppose they fail you?"

....and Jesus answered, "I have no other plans."

It's as awesome as all that.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Second Sunday in Lent March 6, 1977

"THE DEADLY SINS: ENVY"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

1 Peter 2:1

Practically every book that I've known of has attention paid to it because it's a finished production. The writer was able to come to a conclusion.

There is an exceptional book, however, that is remembered because it was never finished. John Milton, in 1629, thought about the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ, and gave to himself the assignment to write a book called "The Passion." That book is remembered because it was never finished.

It's remembered also because of what he wrote in regard to this unfinished work. Let me read his sentiment for you: "The writer, having undertaken this task, found it well beyond his understanding and his year. He has left it unfinished."

So it is with many of us in our day, we contemplate the past -- we even set aside, those of us who belong to a tradition such as ours, this particular season of the year when we meditate anew upon the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ. The more we think about it, the more we're bewildered by it.

To begin with, why did he have to die? Why did God allow this to happen? How is it possible that His death could take away my sin? And what sin of mine in particular might it have been that drove the nails into the Tree? So you and I are baffled by it.

I presume that was one of the grim realizations that came to the four of us as four short weeks ago we walked where Jesus walked...we faced Jerusalem... ...we meditated in the Garden of Gethsemane....we stood within the shadow of Golgotha. And of course you know that I had deep thoughts. I saw people coming

and going, many of them wearing perhaps much the same kind of garb that the people wore in the day of Jesus. And presumably any number of them bent on the same kind of errand or mission that engaged the energy of those who surrounded the disciples who were there in the day of Jesus. And I asked myself question after question . . .

...had I been there then, what would I have been doing?

...on whose side would I have been found?

...and what sin of mine would have caused Him to be rejected?

You can't possibly think of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ without thinking of the sins of mankind - - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son . . . "...that we might have eternal life.

- - "His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save his people from their sins"

....you can't think of the Saviour apart from your sins.....you can't think of your sins apart from the Saviour. It's right and proper, then, that as I come to this sacred desk during these Sunday mornings of Lent I should ask you to think with me about the so-called Deadly Sins. And that isn't to mean that we can take any sin lightly. No sin is ever to be taken lightly. But Pope Gregory had a way of calling seven of them deadly. So Sunday by Sunday we will be thinking about those sins. Last Sunday it was the sin of Pride. Today it's the sin of ENVY. And the text — of course there's a text for a sermon — the 1st verse of the 2nd chapter of First Peter:

"So put away all malice, and all guile insincerity, and envy . . . " .....put it away.

What can I tell you about envy? All that you ever wanted to know but you were afraid to ask.

What do you really want to know about envy? Well, I can begin by telling you that perhaps it's the last sin that you and I will ever want to confess.

Some people, without hesitation, will grant interviews to magazines, and they'll talk about the fact that they've lusted....some people will confess murder...some people will confess that they are robbers....some people will admit that they have not always respected their parents and honored them....some people confess that they forget to keep the Lord's Day holy. But where is the man who is quick to confess that his heart is filled with envy?

It may be the last sin that you and I are about to confess. It's one of those things that we want to keep from other people, and the only way that they may ever know that we're envious is when we turn green with envy -- the self-revelation situation.

The second thing I can tell you about envy is this: that it's one of those sins that seems never to be satisfied. Any number of sins that you and I commit have a way of granting us a measure of gratification along the line...

-- a man may lust after the flesh...and walk away somewhat gratified

-- a man may be gluttonous -- but now honestly, won't he reach the point when he will say, I can't eat another bite ...satisfied....

...not so the sin of envy. As long as somebody has what you and I do not have, and something that we want very, very much, we'll never be satisfied. I can tell you that about envy, you can tell me that about envy.

I can also tell you this about envy, and perhaps it comes to you as a bit of a surprise -- that when you and I talk about the sins that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross, this is the only sin that's mentioned by a Gospel writer by name. In the 27th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew it's recorded:

"For it was for envy that they delivered him to be crucified."

Now let's dwell on that for a moment. It's very, very important. We imagined the entrance to the Holy City, we thought we could hear the people

say "Hosanna to the son of David" and "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord".....we relived Palm Sunday, even though we weren't there on Palm Sunday -- we tried to imagine how it took place....and then in mid-week we tried to figure out why it was that they turned, and now you have them bringing Jesus before Pontius Pilate, and Pontius Pilate, you see the wheels are going around in his head and he's trying to figure it out too: "Why, a short while ago they acclaimed him - - a while ago they talked about him no matter where you went in Galilee and Judea - - a great preacher! -- the miracle-worker! -- why they even said something about his being the Messiah!" .....Pontius Pilate knew that, I dare say.

And he came to the conclusion, I dare say, that it was for envy that they turned him over to the authorities. Because, you see, those leaders of the Jewish church recognized him for the threat that he was. His success could be their undoing. And they couldn't tolerate it. They couldn't stand that kind of competition. Look at it that way! -- realistically, now. For that's the way the Gospel writer puts it down: It was for envy that they delivered him up to be crucified.

Oh, I know there are times when you and I say, because we want to be polite and courteous, "I envy you this" and "I envy you that" - - "Why, if I were in your position, How I wish I were -- you have so much!" - - - we really don't mean that! But when I find someone who is my equal, or my near-equal, who may be as gifted and skilled as I am -- anyone can talk like this -- then a threat, you see, looms upon the horizon.....someone else is a little bit better than I am! And of course one begins to pale by way of comparison and contrast.

Some of us can't quite afford it. You know that, of course you do. And it creates all kinds of ill-will within our hearts, and all kinds of unkind thoughts about the other person. You see, it brings us down to their level, their competition. We have to deal with our fears. No one envies a man who is

below him. It's the person who is very much on my level, a person who is a bit above my level -- just a bit beyond me, you see, it's that person I begin to envy.

So it was with the authorities. He became uncomfortably close to their vantage-point. It was for envy that they delivered him up to be crucified.

Did I ever tell you the story -- it's only a story, of course it is, at least that's the way it came to me -- of the Roman Catholic priest who is said to have been a veritable saint? The people who knew him could not fault him on any score -- one of those exceedingly rare persons....no one seemed to talk of his feet of clay....no one seemed to talk about a twisted or a torn halo. He seemed to be wellnigh perfect....

> ...but according to the story as I heard it, there was a man who lived in a distant city and he said, "It just can't be! Surely he has a Achilles heel somewhere! Surely he will be vulnerable. And I'll be the man to find it out!" So he came and established residence in the village where the priest lived and worked out his vocation for his Lord.
>
> ...he observed him. And after a while he was almost forced to come to a conclusion, they must be right -- I find no fault in him....but yet the visitor to the town persisted -- somewhere, somewhere -- he's vulnerable. And to achieve his own end he did something downright diabolical: he concocted a lie....
>
> ....and he came to the village priest one day -- whose brother was also a priest, in a distant community, perhaps in another country.....and as he met the priest coming from Mass one day he said to him: "Have you heard the news? -- I have just learned that your brother has been named a Bishop!" And that did it! He turned green

with envy. It was his brother -- it was his contemporary, it was his near-equal who suddenly now becomes a bit better. It's the obstacle course that every single one of us runs. How strange that we could not rejoice in someone else's good. But we regret it, and resent it.

Says the Apostle Peter: "Put it away -- lay it aside." But you see, the tragedy is that many of us don't call it by name. Did I tell you about Bernard Shawe's play, in one of them the line goes like this: "If we say we are well it's only because we do not know that we are sick." And that's why I for one am eternally grateful to one of the great Psalms -- Psalm 139 is among my favorites. Ask me to name five favorite Psalms, and Psalm 139 will always be there -- that ends in such a bold and daring way:

> "Search me, O God, and know my heart;
> Try me, and know my thought. And if
> there be any evil way in me, lead me
> in the way everlasting."

....search my heart, O God, for that sin of envy. The sin that the Gospel writer said was so terribly responsible for Your death. It can blind me -- it can cause me to commit any number of other sins.

Have you heard the legend of the man who was walking the road and came upon two other travelers, and as they were about to part, he said, "Let me give you a parting blessing. My parting blessing will be this: I will give a blessing to one of you who expresses his wish first -- surely there is something that you would like to have.....and to the second of you, who does not first express his wish, you'll get <u>double</u> the blessing of the man who expresses his wish first" -- a very unusual situation, of course -- said the traveler to his two companions: "To the man who expresses his wish first, he gets a blessing -- the other man will get a double portion . . . "

...You can imagine what this did between the two of them! For surely envy was about to take over, and neither one spoke. Each was waiting for the other....

...until the one of them could no longer constrain himself, and he grabbed the other by the throat and he said: "If you don't express your wish first, I'll choke you to death!" So he forced him to wish first. And what was his wish? - - "I wish to go blind in one eye."

....immediately he went blind in one eye.

And the other man? - - a double portion: blind in both eyes.

That's the kind of thing that envy brings down upon us --- a double curse.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart....try me, and know my thoughts: and if there be any evil way in me, lead me in the right way" And what is the right way? You get rid of the bad and you replace it by the good.

And a story that I never tire of telling is the story of the man who said, "Do you see that bright new automobile across the street? That man's brother gave it to him." And like as not the natural reaction is, in envy -- "I wish I had a brother like that!"

...but not so this man, who said,

"I wish I could be a brother like that!"

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday in Lent March 13, 1977

"THE DEADLY SINS: LUST"

Romans 13:11-

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Some six years ago a prolific Scottish writer wrote a book and called it "Ethics In A Permissive Society." I have it on my reading desk. I reach for it frequently, as well anyone should who is trying to keep his finger on the pulsebeat of contemporary society. The author dedicated his book to two people, presumably his granddaughters, to whom he referred as those who are the modern generation.

He didn't get very far in his first chapter, a couple of sentences or so, until he wrote:

> "When I was young and first entered the ministry, the great battle-cry was 'Don't bother about theology -- just stick to ethics.' People would say, stop talking about the Trinity, the two natures of Jesus and all that sort of thing....just stick to ethics! ...never mind theology - - just stick to the Sermon on the Mount, and let the abstractions and abstruseness, the philosophy, the mysticism, go. People said, 'Take theology away - - I can't understand it anyway!' "
>
> "But thirty years ago, no one ever really questioned the Christian ethic. Thirty years ago, no one, so it seemed, ever doubted that divorce was disgraceful, that illegitimate babies were a disaster, that chastity was a good thing, that an honest day's work was part of the duty of any respectable and responsible man, that honesty ought to be a part of life. But today - - "

now listen to this, the author went on to conclude

> " . . today, for the first time in history, the whole Christian ethic is under attack. It is not only theology that people want to abandon. It is ethics as well . . . "

It's against that background that I come to the sacred desk this morning, because this is an age of permissiveness. Is there a reason for it? Is there

a rationale, now, with which we have to deal that no other age before had to consider? Could it be that the world is changing so fast that we've lost our sense of moorings, that nothing seems any longer to be stable? That we're inclined to say, no matter who we may be, come what may, "I'll do what I want to do -- don't inhibit me! Let me write my own ticket."

In J. B. Priestley's play "The Linden Tree" one of his characters speaks like this: "If you ask me, we've had it! We just can't last. Oh, I'll take what is coming, but before then I propose to enjoy myself. I tell you, there isn't much time. But, in the meantime, we'll subscribe to the old notion -- eat, drink, be merry -- tomorrow we die!"

Well, you and I who come to this place repeatedly may have our moments when we say the world is going to Hell faster then it's going to Heaven. Or if we don't wax that cynical, we may say, the world will pass away. But in the meantime, we don't say, Christians that we want to be, "Eat, drink and be merry -- enjoy yourself -- find what measure of pleasure you can and grasp it at any price, and don't let anybody stand in your way. To that end, be yourself.

When I stop, as you must stop, at the intersection of Colesville Road and Fenton for the traffic light to change, and if I find myself directly opposite the Hecht Store, on occasion my eye goes to the window, and there somebody has scrawled in contemporary fashion, as the shop is directly inside the window, these words: I'VE GOTTA BE ME. I get impatient with that, because I know how some people interpret it....."Don't get in my way -- I want to express myself -- I want to be me"

Well that's alright if a person would ask himself what kind of person he's meant to be. I suggest to you, my friend, that as far as life is concerned, we can either be ape or angel. But you see, we are followers of Jesus Christ,

and Jesus Christ is always reminding us that we're meant for Heaven. Jesus Christ is always reminding us in one way or another that we're meant to wear a halo -- that people who subscribe to His teachings and wrote those marvelous pages that constitute the other part of the New Testament, in letter after letter we're told that we're meant to be the sons of God, the children of God -- meant to live and to behave in this wicked world as His sons. We're not meant to be apish. We're meant to be angelic.

Oh, I have no quarrel with "I've gotta be me" if the person will take time enough to ask himself, this me that I've got to be, will it be the best possible me? Did I ever tell you about that grand old Jewish rabbi who on occasion used to wish that he were somebody else?....and then one night in a dream it occurred to him that in the time of Judgment, he would be asked, not, Why weren't you like Moses?...but he would be asked, Why weren't you like Zusya? -- and that happened to be his name -- just simply to suggest, why weren't you yourself? -- your best possible self?

You know, don't you, why some of us keep coming back to this place Sunday after Sunday -- simply to be reminded of who we are, simply to be reminded of what our potential can be, simply to receive that inspiration, that encouragement, to live as the sons of God. Honestly now, it can be as simple as all that! You've come in vain if that isn't what happens here each Lord's Day, among other wonderful things that take place. I did say it, you remember: we can be ape-ish....or we can be angelic. We are the ones who say we know we're meant to set our affections upon spiritual things, upon Heavenly things.

Today's sermon is another in the series on the Deadly Sins - - the Deadly Sin of Lust. I touch base every now and then with our other pastor, as you might well know that I would. Sometimes I have to seize the moment when it's possible to do it. Last night around 11:00 o'clock I called him on the phone... we talked about today. He apprized me of the fact that he wouldn't be here,

reminding me he had told me before -- he's gone with our young people on their itinerary....but then he said, "What are you going to preach on tomorrow? -- which sin this time?" And I said, "David, it's the sin of Lust." He immediately replied, "Well, you shouldn't have any trouble holding their interest!"

...and I immediately said to myself, and what did he mean by that? Could he mean that every single one of us in one way or another has done battle on this score?...that every single one of us is fully informed as to the meaning of lust? And if I as a preacher should hold your interest it's only because I would be reviewing something for you with which you're already familiar? .....is that what he meant when he said I shouldn't have any trouble holding your interest?

Or could it be that among you there are those who have seen the damage that has been done to people who have allowed their appetite to be uncurbed, who have gone through life simply with a desire to satisfy all that is sensual? Could it be that some of you, even as has been true for me, have tried, and you have tried, to put together some of the damaged pieces? -- where lust has had full sway?

There's a text for today's sermon, of course there is, and you can have your choice. I'll read it in two translations. The first is the old one in which some of us grew up, the King James interpretation. That man Paul, who got around, you know, who really knew what life was like, as he wrote to a group of Christians who lived in the imperial city of Rome, he said something like this, in the 13th chapter:

> "Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkedness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lust thereof."

Now if perchance that has not made the impact that it's meant to make, I am reasonably certain that you won't miss it in this translation, for this is the way J. B. Phillips puts the same words:

> "Let us live cleanly, as in the daylight: not in the delights of getting drunk, or playing with sex, nor yet in quarreling or jealousies . . ."
>
> (listen to this)
>
> ". . . Let us be Christ's men from head to foot, and give no chance to the flesh to have its fling."

Now, I know quite a bit about lust. Not only on personal experience, but also on what I've gathered from you. You see, I who stand in front of you am also the same person who has sat with you in the confessional booth which is my study. Now, what can I tell you about lust?

Well, first off, it's usually referred to as the sin of the flesh, more so perhaps than any of the sins -- the sin of the flesh. The sin that's committed when people permit themselves to be more animal-like than angelic. And anybody who has been a farm hand knows exactly what I mean. An animal seeks to have its appetites satisfied. It thinks only in terms of its physical gratification. An animal has no conscience. Lust is a sin of those who live animal-like, who crave, who desire, and stop at nothing until it's satisfied, from a purely physical, sensual sense.

It's a sin that's usually referred to as the sin of sexual abuse. Now let me say to you without any hesitation, from the Christian perspective, sex is meant to be perfectly beautiful. It's that exceedingly precious thing that God has allowed human beings, in the most intimate of relations, by which two people can know each other as otherwise they would not know each other. I don't have to remind you, do I, that repeatedly in the Old Testament that was the reference for the sexual act: ". . and this man knew her . . " -- identified fully and completely. And in that relationship, a sense of responsibility was established. From the Christian perspective, let it be said again, sex is

meant to be perfectly beautiful.

But when a man or woman gives way to lust, it is abused, it's cheapened. That's why J. B. Phillips is absolutely right when he spells it out so clearly: "Let us live cleanly, as in the daylight, not in the delights of getting drunk, or playing with sex . . . "

The other thing I can tell you about the sin of lust is that it's the sin that begins in a man's mind. It's related to fanticizing. I may look at you and you may look at me and you may know by the results of what's around me what I have been up to -- the evidence is there, I did something. But when I look you in the eye and you look me in the eye, you can't always tell what we're thinking. Oh, sometimes we can tell, when we look at somebody, just what they have been thinking.....but not always. And that's one of the things that needs to be said about the sin of lust. It begins down deep inside a man, and it's possible for a person to shield it from somebody else. It's sometimes referred to as the sin of imagination. That's why you and I have a right to get up-tight about pornography. A man becomes according to the things that claim his thought. It's Scriptural, I tell you -- "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life," -- as a man thinks -- according to the things on which is mind will dwell, that's what he eventually becomes. It's as terrible as all that!

And that's why a person has to be careful of what he reads, that's why a person has to be very careful of what he sees. That's why a man has to be very careful of what he thinks. He may allow himself to believe that he's getting away with it - - he may draw the shutters as far as the rest of the world is concerned, and then retire to the recesses of his own mind and think. Ezekiel, long before the time of Jesus Christ, used to tell about those characters who had enviable reputation in the streets of the city in which they lived, but Ezekiel says, when night came, under cover of darkness they would

hie themselves away, even to the temple, and they had a secret passage....and they'd close their door behind them and then in their little quarter they'd commit all kinds of indulgences, and orgies -- as though not even God could detect what they were up to.....and then they'd turn their back and go back before the dawn to where they lived, and allow themselves to believe that as they lived and labored in the streets in the town in which they lived, that no one would ever know. So you and I, my friend, we may not hie ourselves away to some secret place, but we do have the secret recesses in our hearts where we indulge such things. Our Blessed Lord, you know, came down very heavily on this, and spoke about such things as the lust of the heart -- the lust of the eye. That's where it begins.

I should also tell you this about the sin of lust: it's a very ugly thing because it's the sin of exploitation. It uses people, for selfish gratification, satisfaction. That's what makes it so ugly.

Is that all I can say to you? -- time has run out. There's an antidote, of course. Each of the translations puts it magnificently. Says J. B. Phillips, "Let us then be Christ's men from head to foot, and don't give a chance to the flesh, to have its fling." I am convinced, the longer I live, that most of the sins you and I commit are somewhat premeditated. Really now, we have thought something about them. We don't just turn the corner and then all of a sudden do something wrong. Well, let a man guard his thoughts -- that's the way to conquer lust. Because we're human we'll have such thoughts, but because we're made in the divine image, we don't have to stay on the animal level. And every now and then, beforehand, a man ought to think of where he's going. And when a man starts taking down fences, he ought to ask himself occasionally why they were put up in the first place.

Some months ago I saw Archie Bunker on television, and he was referring to that time of indiscretion and he was confessing to his wife, and he fumbled along and he said, "It all happened because I didn't know where I was going, and before I knew it I was there!' . . . . . (transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday in Lent March 20, 1977

"DEADLY SINS: GLUTTONY"

Matthew 11:19

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Let me tell you what I presume you know, that these Sunday mornings during Lent we have been thinking about the Seven Deadly Sins. It occurred to me last night that I haven't named all of the Seven Deadly Sins for you so far in this series. Let me do it now. According to Pope Gregory the Great, here's the classic list of the so-called Seven Deadly Sins: Pride; Envy; Anger; Dejection, or Sloth; Avarice, Gluttony; Lust. Bless his soul, he wasn't content to stop at that point by simply numbering deadly sins, he went on to settle over against them a corresponding list of Christian virtues. As an example, you could correct the sin by practicing a virtue....

- - if you're guilty of the sin of Pride.....you just practice at becoming humble....
- - if you envy people.....you make up your mind that you're going to love them....
- - if you get angry, you practice patience.....
- - if you're subject to sloth and dejection.....then you school yourself to keep your soul on the alert.....
- - if you're guilty of avarice, then you make it a business to become generous.....
- - if you succumb to the sin of gluttony....then you try to do something with abstinence.....
- - if you're guilty of the sin of lust....then you place an exceptionally high value upon chastity....

For the good man of God it was quite simple: you overcome each of the sins by

practicing the opposite virtue.

Today we come to the next-to-the-last sermon in this series. Already we've dealt with Pride, Envy and Lust. Today and next Sunday remain -- we have four sins to go. Today it's GLUTTONY.....next Sunday it will be AVARICE. ANGER and SLOTH will have to wait for another season.

Now, it's been said regarding gluttony, that it's the simplest of the Seven Deadly Sins. Who doesn't understand what it is to have an appetite, or a thirst, that doesn't quite seem to be satisfied? Who doesn't know what it is to want to eat and to eat and to eat...and to drink and to drink? But before anything else is said, let me suggest this to you, that you just can't equate the sin of Gluttony with obesity, any more than you can declare virtuous every trim-figured person that you meet. You just can't do that sort of thing. You'll keep that in mind, won't you?

Paul Tournier, in one of his writings, maintains that there are many kinds of gluttony, and this too we need to recognize - -

> ...there is such a thing as the gluttony of praise. You and I know people -- on occasion maybe we have been such people -- who crave to hear the compliment, we may even fish for it. We need to hear something nice said about us, and we're not satisfied until we hear it. There can be such a thing as the gluttony of praise which is vanity.....
>
> ...there is such a thing as the gluttony for money, where some people just aren't satisfied - - they keep after it and after it and after it, the more they can grasp -- and it's the sin of avarice, of course it is...
>
> ...there's such a thing, and who doesn't know this in this day and age, as the gluttony for power? - - and by anybody in a position where he might become important, and he does his best to make himself secure in that position, so much so that he's almost tyrannical in his behavior. In fact, the gluttony after power can lead to the sin of tyranny....

...there's such a thing as the gluttony for sexual experience, the whetting of the appetite, the insistence for gratification. And that, of course, is the sin of lust.....

But quite frankly, the sense in which we refer to gluttony as a deadly sin is simply to be understood as the excessive indulgence in food and drink. And that's what we will be dealing with in this sermon today.

When I announced to some of my friends last week or so that the sin to be considered today would be the sin of Gluttony, one of them immediately countered me by saying, "How are you going to justify that Scripturally?" Well, little did I realize that that person presumably knew more about the Bible at this point than I did, because as I continued to prepare for the sermon I checked the concordance, and in the concordance that I have on my shelf, there are only four references to gluttony in the entire Bible -- two of them are found in the Old Testament, two are found in the New Testament. And I don't know what you'll make of this when I tell you that the two that are found in the New Testament are references made to Jesus Christ, when His enemies tried to lower the boom on Him, and they said something like this, which serves as the text for today's sermon, the 19th verse of the 11th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

> "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' . . . "

When someone tried to find one of the worst possible things that they could say about Jesus Christ, they said He's gluttonous....He's a drunkard.

But now that first reference to it in the Old Testament, you ought to pay some attention to it. Its implication will make us quite uncomfortable, I dare say. It's in the 21st chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, and the 20th verse, where the People of Israel are being given to understand that Jehovah God

is going to be very stringent with them, and if they're to be His people, there are certain rules and regulations that will have to be adhered to. Well now, let me read this for you in a modern translation:

> "Suppose a man has a son who is stubborn and rebellious . . "
>
> (I'm reading Scripture for you now)
>
> " . . a son who will not obey his parents, even though they punish him. His parents are to take him before the leaders of the town where he lives and make him stand trial. They are to say to them, 'our son is stubborn, he's rebellious, he refuses to obey us - he is a glutton and a drunkard' . . . "

....now you notice what they're doing in this case - - they're really equating his disobedience, his rebelliousness, with his being a glutton and a drunkard, because he's never known what it is to discipline himself, and to curb himself....

He's the original one who says, "I want to be myself -- I want to do my own thing . . . " No curb, no restraint - - -

> " Our son is stubborn and rebellious, and refuses to obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard . . . "

They say that all in the same breath.

Now brace yourself for this - - this is how seriously they took this:

> " Then the men of the city are to stone him to death: and so you will get rid of this evil. Everyone in Israel will hear what has happened and be afraid."

Alright, what is the sin of gluttony? It's the sin of those who are excessively indulgent in luxuriant eating and drinking. Now before anything else is said, we have to clearly understand the fact that the Christian faith has never embraced the ethic of asceticism. To be a Christian one ought not have to give up eating and drinking. When I went out to India on that special assignment some years back, one of the first things that I learned was that there was such a thing as eating and drinking to the glory of God, because when you ate and drank in their homes you did it at some risk to your own health. But it was the kind of thing that had to be done - - the little that they had, they were offended if you didn't break bread with them. And so you ate and

drank, at the risk of your own health, but to the glory of God!

And when I remember when our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He spent so much of His time eating and drinking with people. In fact, they made much of that and lowered the boom on Him because of it. Once when He talked about Heaven - - what did He do? He likened it to a banquet feast. In the Gospel Lesson that Mr. Underwood read for us today -- how does it end? - - there's merriment, there's rejoicing, they kill the fatted calf. They can't possibly think of a celebration without eating and drinking!

> - - when we were last in Jericho and we stood underneath a sycamore tree, I went back and thought of Zacchaeus -- it wasn't beyond our Blessed Lord to invite Himself to supper! He placed that kind of value upon it....so He says to Zacchaeus -- "You get yourself down out of that tree, brother - - I'm going to go to your house and you're going to get a meal for me....we're going to eat together...." ...and as they ate together they had that tremendous encounter whereby his whole life was changed, just because of the kind of thing that happened when they broke bread together...and Jesus initiated it....He placed a high value upon it.

And you and I need to remember it.

Well then, what is wrong? The Christian ethic never forbids the simple and healthy pleasure which eating and drinking and talking together bring. But here as everywhere else what is important is the spirit in which the thing is done. The old Jews, bless their souls, had a saying that two men could sit at the same Passover meal... for the one it was an act of worship...and for the other, it was an act of gluttony. When the food begins to surpass the fellowship in importance, then the limitation of propriety is being reached.

Now for those of us to whom this is important, and to all of us to whom

it should be important, what kind of a test can we apply? How certain can you be of committing the sin of gluttony or not committing it? Well, let me suggest several tests.

First, there is the test of <u>health.</u> All excess is wrong, and excess in this matter is wrong also. It is perfectly right and essential to eat to live. It is quite wrong to live in order to eat. And there are some people for whom the only big event in their day is the next meal -- honestly! The kind of luxury which injures health and renders a man physically unfit, and which makes him less and not more fit for his work, is something which is obviously wrong. The enjoyment which makes a man less healthy and less able to cope with life is an enjoyment which costs too much. The test of health is as good as any. The enjoyment which produces health is legitimate enjoyment. The enjoyment which damages health is gluttony.

Christians place a high value on the body -- you know that, don't you? It's from the New Testament that we learn such an expression as "The body is the temple of the Holy Ghost." We can't serve our Lord in this world as disembodied spirits. Did it ever occur to you that that's one reason why we encourage people to have a church funeral? We bring the body into the church -- this body which comes to us as a gift, this body which is sacred in God's sight -- this body which is of so great value while we live here in this present world...we place a high value upon it. It is precious in God's sight. Now, therefore, we have to pay attention to the sin of gluttony because overeating can be injurious to health.

Now relax a bit, I'm perfectly aware of the fact that according to certain charts I ought to be fifteen pounds less than I am - - and I thoroughly enjoy eating. Having gotten up at five o'clock this morning, I can't wait until one o'clock today when we're invited out for dinner. But my problem will be not how fast I can get there - - my problem is going to be how long I stay. Last

it become injurious to my health by consuming more than my body needs. It's as serious as all that!

I had a friend, a doctor, who took first cognizance of the bulge, and he said, "Do you realize that's the equivalent, perhaps, of your carrying around a cinder block all day -- of the excessive weight and the drain and the strain upon your heart." So one begins at that point and says one can be gluttonous if the amount of food that he consumes is injurious to his health. It's been said that there are some people who eat their way into a grave -- they dig their grave by eating.

The second test is the test of extravagance. It's a known fact, and maybe you could be Exhibit A in this case, that some people frequently spend on one meal, for one person, more than an old-age pensioner will spend for himself or herself for food for a week. For the person who wants very much to be a Christian, there is no justification for the extravagance of a luxury like this.

I shudder when I think how much food goes into the garbage bin. Did I not notice on a television program the other day, in the food program for youngsters in the public schools, how much they don't eat. Now I know that you can build a case and say that it's not well prepared, and I'm numbered among those who think that it's a very shameful thing not to prepare food well, to make it attractive and well seasoned. But this sinful thing of throwing it aside lightly, especially when you realize that we live in a world where here in the United States we are the only country on the face of the earth where over-eating constitutes a major problem for many people. But at the same time we happen to live in a world where half of the people in the world go to bed at night hungry, and where for some people the most important single thing for them in their day is a handful of rice! We live in a world like that. And yet we go on eating and eating, as well we should, but when we do it extravagantly . . .

The acid test, I presume, is the sin of selfishness, and this is the

best test of all. There is something wrong with the Christian conscience of any man who can enjoy having so much when others have so little. Some of you have been kind enough on occasion to ask me to suggest prayers that you can use for table grace. I remember one that I have submitted for your use:

"Let not the abundance of this food placed before
us, no matter the amount, keep us from being
mindful of those who do not have."

We commit the sin of gluttony every time we sit down to eat and become insensitive to the fact that there are those who do not have. Let me give you a very simple home-spun illustration, if you don't mind. 'Grossmutter' lives with us -- she'll be 92 next month -- she's invalided, confined to a wheelchair. I can raid the refrigerator....she can't. And every now and then I find my conscience being pricked when I so very easily go to that refrigerator and eat, without much thinking about the fact that I'm not taking any to her.

...any time any man sits down to eat and becomes
insensitive to the fact that others are not eating,
he, really now, is committing the sin of gluttony....

...and you never thought of it that way, did you?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fifth Sunday in Lent March 27, 1977

"DEADLY SINS: AVARICE"

I Timothy 1:6

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

We come today to the last in the series of sermons being preached this Lenten-tide on the general theme of the "Deadly Sins." Permit me to say a thing or two by way of general observation in this, the final sermon of the series.

It may be of some interest to you to know that at one time Pastor David and I thought it could be a very salutary exercise for us if in the course of a given week we could follow some of you around, and go to your place of work, where you invest your time and your energy. We came to the conclusion that we'd be delightfully surprised at the kind of thing that's being done in this world by members of this parish. And particularly now for the moment, those of you who are engaged in scientific and technological work.

Now if it were possible for us to do this kind of thing, I'm reasonably certain that after we would be sufficiently impressed, and both of us would be driven back to Saint Luke Church, and we'd find ourselves falling upon our knees within the shadow of this altar, asking God to empower us in order to proclaim to you the truth-of-truths that remains, that no matter how much we may be advanced scientifically and technologically, we have not been advanced spiritually. The fact remains, we are still sinners. We haven't made much progress, honestly now.

That's why I, for one, can fully appreciate the way Professor Langdon Gilke (?) puts it in his book entitled "Religion In The Scientific Future" - - listen to these words: "The scientific age, which has added immensely to our understanding and to our powers, has not made us virtuous, nor has it made

the meanings of our life any more secure. Our control over ourselves, and our consequent control over our own destiny, seem in no wise to be more within our grasp than before. The old theological problems of the use man makes of his freedom, of his bondage to self-interest, and of the ultimate meaning of the human story, have been dissolved neither by the physical nor by the life sciences. Rather," - - and then he concludes with this alarming observation, "they have been precisely increased by them."

I go on to shudder at the realization of what the Apostle Paul said centuries and centuries ago: "The good that I want to do, I don't do, and the evil that I don't want to do, I do." Who doesn't understand that? As over against that the words of Edwin Markham come quickly to mind: "Why build these cities glorious if man unbuilded goes? In vain we build the work unless the builder also grows." Despite all the advances that we've made scientifically, man is still driven to his knees and brands himself a sinner. That's why, Sunday by Sunday I've come back to this sacred desk during this season-of-all-seasons, to talk to you about sin.

One or two of you have been made bold enough to say that you've found me a bit more sober than usual during the preaching of these sermons. And if that should be your observation, undoubtedly you're quite correct. Because no man can take sin lightly, and the more one recognizes the love of God, the more he sees himself the unworthy one.

In this final presentation there are several things now that ought to be said. One, we have been talking about the so-called Deadly Sins - - but don't for a minute allow yourself to think that there are only certain sins that have to be taken seriously, and any number of other sins we can take lightly. I think I know what Pope Gregory the Great had in mind when he catalogued certain sins as "Deadly." I think I have some appreciation for the Roman Catholic doctrine that labels sins as "venial" and "mortal." But having said

that, I must say to you very quickly and earnestly, sin is sin. And every single sin that you and I commit has to be taken seriously. You can never indulge in the luxury of allowing yourself to believe that only a limited number of sins are deadly. I suggest to you that <u>any</u> sin that you and I commit, no matter how insignificant it may seem to us, is always something that takes us in the direction of Hell! <u>Any</u> sin moves you in the way of Hell and away from Heaven. For sin basically is always separation from God, creating and establishing a gap.

I should also say to you with all the strength that my soul can command, that even though some of us get to the place where we think we can handle <u>our</u> sins, and keep them pretty much a private matter, there is no such thing as a private sin. Sin is always corporate by nature. Sooner or later it always involves somebody else. And you and I do have our moments when we think we can scream ourselves and behind our scream indulge in our sin. But it just can't be, my friend. For every man casts a lengthened shadow on somebody else, and there is always the possibility that my sin could cause somebody else to sin.

That's the frightening thing, you know, it does work that way. And that's why sin can never be taken lightly. For my sin, even though I may learn to handle it, even though I may have the benefit of the grace of God and know myself forgiven and cleansed -- the result remains. It can have a dastardly effect upon somebody else. So that's why I've come ever so seriously to the sacred desk these Sundays during Lent to talk to you about Sin.

There's another observation that may hold us in good stead, if you don't mind. William F. May has written a very valuable book called "The Catalogue Of Sins" which to all intents and purposes is a contemporary examination of the Christian conscience. He comes up with this interesting paragraph -- you may not have thought of it this way -- "The association of certain sins with

different members or conditions of the human body is often partly functional and partly metaphorical." Now listen - -

" - - lying -- it's associated with the tongue....

- - envy -- with the intense gaze of the eye.....

- - lust -- with the genitals.....

- - gluttony -- with the throat and the stomach.....

- - anger -- with boiling blood.....

- - pride -- with the puffed chest.....

- - avarice (the sin we're going to talk about now)

-- with arms and hands.....

...for avarice is always to be seen as the sin of the greedy grasp.

Molier has a play, doesn't he, in which the avaricious hero is called Parthegon, a name that comes from the Greek which means, like a sickle, or a hook - - for that's the sin of avarice....to reach....to grasp greedily...to keep for oneself.

The sermon has a text, of course it does, and it's a text that comes readily to your mind as you recall the King James translation: "For the love of money is the root of all evil." Ordinarily when we think of avarice we think of greed for gold. It may benefit you to hear the translations of two other people of this same text. J. B. Phillips is very enlightening as he gives us his understanding of I Timothy 1:6 -- "For loving money leads to all kinds of evil, and some men in their struggle to be rich have lost their faith and caused themselves untold agonies of mind." The translator of Today's English Version of the Good News Bible puts it in this way: "For the love of money is a source of all kinds of evil. Some have been so eager to have it that they have wandered away from the faith and have broken their hearts with many sorrows."

Now I want to say to you very quickly that while we may misquote the text and then when we come back to an appreciation for the text we talk about the

evil which is the misuse of money.....I must very quickly tell you that money can also be the cause of great good. You must never forget that. It can become our opportunity by which we can witness effectively in the name of Jesus Christ. Little known to some of you may be the fact that I have a benefactor here in Saint Luke who occasionally writes out a check in a generous amount of money, and I am permitted to be that person's agent to use that money in bringing a blessing to people who otherwise might not receive a blessing. I can't begin to tell you what a tremendous satisfaction it is to see the lot of certain people improved just because there was some money made available by which their lot could be improved. I thank God that I can be an agent in behalf of someone, to brighten somebody else's life here and there, just because there's a fund upon which I can draw.

Now don't misunderstand me, I can't possibly think of Saint Luke Church aside from money. Every Lord's Day that you and I come and worship in this place, we channel through this altar $2,000 a week in order to prove ourselves as God's obedient servants -- to see that the hungry are fed, the ill-clad are clothed, the destitute are cared for with compassion, and the people are trained and prepared for the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, that the Gospel is taken to places near and far away. You just don't do it by disembodied spirits. You need a certain amount of money by which to equip the messenger, and they have to come bearing something in their hand. For it could well be that in a certain situation that's the <u>only</u> thing that's going to be ameliorating -- because there is something to offer in a tangible way.

I can't think of Saint Luke Church aside from its use of money and its consecration of money. There is a great deal of good that can come through money. Will you indulge me for a moment? -- I don't want to be a penniless preacher, and if I had my life to live over again, I would have placed a greater value upon setting aside a certain amount of money for investment, that there

might come a greater yield so that I could have more money by which to do the things that Winifred and I thoroughly enjoy doing in behalf of other people. Don't misunderstand me -- to be able to use money is an opportunity which God gives us to better the situation in which some people find themselves. It may be the only tool that we may be able to use.

....indulge me for another minute, will you? I went to college during the Depression -- I got seven years of education beyond high school. Even though I worked hard myself to earn some money, I would never have gotten through college and seminary if it had not been that somewhere along the line there were certain people who provided scholarships, endowed this chair and that chair in an institution of higher learning.....

There's no end to the good that can come in this world because people use money wisely and well. It becomes our opportunity.

But there is such a thing as the sin of avarice, the sin-of-the-greedy-grasp, which is the inordinate desire to have more than we need. And that's why it's so bad.

Let me read something for you that I gleaned in my reading the other day. A few years before World War I, a man who was statistically inclined calculated that 100 years before that time the average man in Britain wanted 72 things and actually needed only 16....and then he calculated a hundred years later. He estimated that the average man wanted 484 things, and really needed only 94. The sin of avarice raises its ugly head every time you and I spend far more time than we ought to on the things that we could get along without.

It's the sin-of-the-greedy-grasp to want to have more and more and more. John Wesley, bless his soul -- do you remember I used to tell you about him -- he discovered one time when he was preaching that he was earning 30 pounds a year -- I suppose that might be about 80 U.S. dollars now. And then it occurred to him that the year before he was able to live on 28 pounds a year...and right

there and then made up his mind that no matter how much more he would earn, he'd try to live on 28 pounds a year. It's a matter of record that he went on to earn 40 pounds...60 pounds....80 pounds....120 pounds.....and he still lived on 28 pounds a year, lest he allow himself to succumb to the greedy grasp. That sin of avarice raises its head in ugly ways.

Paul Wickre, my friend and neighbor and highly esteemed member of this congregation, is the only man that I know of who with marked regularity, every time the government offered an increase in salary, wrote them a letter and questioned the wisdom of such a procedure. He was a prudent man, and placed a high value on the dollar. But he also remembered how people lived in South Dakota -- he remembered how people lived in other parts of the country and didn't have nearly the advantage that people have whose salaries are paid by the Federal Government. He recognized it as the subtle sin of avarice, that's what he did, to relish the thought of an increase that in his own mind couldn't be justified. But there aren't very many Paul Wickres, you see, and some of us squirm a bit and are reluctant to think in such terms. Stained by original sin, we all want more...and more...and more.

I don't know whether they do it any more, but I'm glad they did it when I was growing up and they made much of it, to teach us certain values by way of reciting fables and legends. I am profoundly grateful for those who taught me about King Midas, the king whose wish was granted that whatever he would touch would turn to gold. His was the greedy grasp for gold. Oh, it was wonderful for a while. But then one day he touched the fragile petal of a flower -- a man's soul was meant to be fed on beauty -- the petal turned to gold. One morning, was it -- he sat down to eat his porridge, and he touched it -- it turned to gold. You can't eat gold! . . . . and then you remember, the worst of all things happened -- his daughter, his pride and his joy, came, and he turned to her with a pure paternal embrace, and as he touched her, she turned

to gold. This is the tragedy of the greedy grasp. Of all the sins perhaps, none is quite as self-destructive, and what is more, causes untold misery to those we love and those who love us.

Is it in the Brothers Kamarazoff that the story is told about the onion, the woman who in Judgment is confined to a fiery pit -- she cries out for rescue. The angels hover over her and say, Search the record of her life. Could she at one time have done one good deed that would now hold her in good stead by which she could be freed from this miserable pit?"....and the recorder of deeds discovered that once in her life a beggar came her way and she plucked from her own garden an onion and gave it to him. The angel issues the order: "Take that onion, and let an angel hover over her" -- and as the angel comes with the onion she grasps for the onion, in order to be made free and to be rescued from the fiery pit...but there are others in the fiery pit, and they reach for her . . . (incomplete as tape is turned over)

It's so important, I wonder if you'll bear with me as I read it for you because I don't want you to miss a single detail. And once I've read it for you the sermon will conclude without any further comment....

Tolstoy has a beautiful tale of a young Russian who fell heir to his father's small farm. He was no sooner in possession of this land than he began to dream eagerly of how he could add to it. One morning a stranger, evidently a person of power and authority, came to him and told him, as they were standing near the old homestead, that he could have, for nothing, all the land he could walk over in one day. But at sundown he must be back at the very place where he had started. Pointing to the grave of the young man's father, the stranger said, "This is the point to which you must return."

The youth looked eagerly over the rich fields in the distance, and throwing off his coat and without waiting to say a word to his wife and to his children, he started off across the fields. His first plan was to cover a

tract of ground six miles square....but when he had walked the six, he decided to make it nine!.....and then twelve.....and then fifteen - - - which would give him sixty miles to walk before sundown.

By noon he had covered two sides of the square, or thirty miles. But eager to get on and encompass the whole distance, he did not stop for food, and an hour later he saw an old man drinking at a spring, but in his hunger for land he brushed aside the cup which the old man had offered him, and he rushed on in his eager quest for the possession of the land. When he was a few miles from his goal he was worn down with fatigue.....a few hundred yards from the line he saw the sun approaching the horizon and he knew that he had but a few minutes left. Hurrying on and ready to faint, he summoned all of his energies for a last effort, and managed to stagger across the line just as the sun was sinking.

But as he crossed the line he saw a cruel cynical smile on the face of the stranger who had promised him the land, and who was waiting there for him at his father's grave. Just as he crossed the line, the master and the possessor, he thought, of fifteen square miles of rich land, the youth fell dead upon the ground which he had coveted. The stranger then said to the servants, "I offered him all the land that he could cover. Now, you see what it is -- six feet long by two feet wide - - and I thought he would like to have this land close to his father's grave, rather than to have it anywhere else." And with that the stranger, who was Death, vanished, saying, "I have kept my pledge."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

g. f.

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Easter Day

April 10, 1977

"TO LIVE TRIUMPHANTLY"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Ephesians 1:19-20

The first funeral that our Associate Pastor and I ever shared occurred before he was graduated from divinity school. Both of us had been asked to participate in the burial of a grand, good and great man whom together we had come to love and to respect. He was the only member/non-member of this parish, I dare say, to be named by formal action of the congregation an associate member of Saint Luke Church. His name was Ellwood F. DeLong, the octogenarian who left his mark upon this church as the designer of the Chapel of The Grateful Heart, and he also master-minded the re-furbishing of this chancel some few years back.

Those of you who are equally privileged to know him will remember him for the rare and precious soul that he was. As for myself, I personally am very much indebted to him, because I dare say of all the people that I've ever known, he was the one above all others who taught me how to live - - and when the time comes I should add -- how to die.

I went to see him when he was on his death-bed in that hospital not far from Philadelphia. The dread cancer had taken its toll. He could not see, he could only hear and recognize the voice of a friend. And as he put his hand out searchingly for mine -- I grasped it -- and then he spoke magnificently of what life had come to mean to him. And again as before when we had talked, often, he repeated himself as old people can do, and calling me by name, he said, "Raymond, never just live somehow - - learn to live triumphantly!" That was the key-note of his life. A grand and good man taught me how to live -- and I should add, how to die.

There's a title for this brief sermon today: "To Live Triumphantly." And the text, a little-recognized verse, perhaps you've never come upon it. Really now, some of you may be hearing it for the first time. The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Christians who lived in Ephesus these words:

> "And how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God. That power, the same divine energy which was demonstrated in Christ when he raised him from the dead."

...a free translation would be:

> "Just as God was able to do for Christ what He did -- triumphantly He raised him from the dead -- so that same power could be made effective in your life"

Ellwood DeLong said it - - "Don't just live somehow -- live triumphantly!"

The young fellow went to the wise-old-man-of-the-mountain and he said "Old-man-of-the-mountain, tell me, what is the lesson of life?" The old man said to his young friend, "I will tell you the lesson of life in three words: 'Life goes on.'" Now that's not a distinctively Christian philosophy. Anybody could say that. For life has a way of proving its point. But the distinctively Christian philosophy is that life is meant to go on triumphantly, come wind or weather, defeat and despair. For the Christian life is meant to be lived triumphantly.

Charles Dickens had a novel, the character is Miss Haversham. She was engaged to be married. At twenty minutes to nine on the wedding day the groom sent word he had changed his mind, he wasn't going through with it. Unable to cope with the blow, Miss Haversham issued an order to her servants that all the clocks should stop at twenty minutes to nine and never again tick...not a single piece of food was to be taken from the banquet table spread for the festive day. She even decided she'd never again take from her body the dress that she had chosen for her wedding day. For her, life stopped once the blow had been struck. It did not go on. She never knew that life was meant to go on triumphantly.

A young man had written a book. He came to J. M. Barrie and said, "Help me -- for me the most difficult thing remains. I can't choose a title for what I have written. Here's the manuscript -- read it -- suggest a title."

J. M. Barrie said, "I won't have to read it. You can keep it in your hand, but I'll ask you two questions and when you answer me those two questions I'll give you a title for your book: the first question -- Are there any drums in your book?"....and the young man shook his head and said, "No drums." He said, "Then are there any trumpets in this book that you have written?"....and the young man shook his head and said, "No trumpets." And Barrie said, "There's the title: 'Without Drums and Trumpets.'" There are people like that, who live out the days of their years without drums and trumpets -- never knowing what it is to live and to forever live triumphantly.

This is the meaning of Easter, my friend. Jesus Christ is not just a man who lived life somehow. He lived and died triumphantly. He took the blows that were given and laid His hand upon them and by the power of God transformed them into strength, and beauty. And we too are meant to do the same thing. Says the Apostle Paul, "This same power that raised up Christ from the dead is meant to be made effective in your life as well."

I once met Bob Considine. I have a high appreciation for his spiritual perception. He once wrote this little piece -- I'll read you only a part of it. The story begins early in 1950 in the Taylors' small apartment in Waltham, Massachusetts. Edith Taylor was sure that she was the luckiest woman on the block. She and Carl had been married 23 years, and her heart still skipped a beat when he walked into the room. As for Carl, he gave every appearance of a man in love with his wife. If his job as government warehouse worker took him out of town, he would write Edith each night and send small gifts from every place that he visited.

...in February, 1950, Carl was sent to Okinawa for a few months to work in a new government warehouse. It was a long time to be away, and

so far. This time no little gifts came. Edith understood. He was saving his money for the house they had long dreamed of owning (anyway) but a few pennies for a postage stamp? Then after weeks of silence came a letter:

"Dear Edith....I wish there were a kinder way to tell you -- we no longer are married . . . "

Edith walked to the sofa and sat down. He had written to Mexico for a mail-order divorce...he had married Aika, a Japanese maid-of-all-work assigned to his quarters. Aika was 19...Edith was 48. Now, says Considine, if I were making up this story the rejected wife would fight that quickie paper divorce -- she would have hated her husband and that other woman...she would want vengeance for her own shattered life. But, says Considine, I am describing here simply what did happen.

Edith Taylor did not hate Carl. Perhaps she had loved him so long that she was unable to stop. She could picture the situation, charitable that she was - - a lonely man...constant closeness. But even so, Carl had not done the easy, shameful thing. He had chosen divorce rather than taking advantage of a young servant girl. The only thing Edith could not believe was that he had stopped loving her. Some day, somehow, Carl, she thought, would come home. And Edith now built her life around this thought.

....she wrote Carl, asking him to keep her in touch with his life. In time he wrote that he and Aika were expecting a baby. Maria was born in 1951....Helen was born in 1953. Edith sent gifts to the little girls. She still wrote to Carl and he wrote back. And then one day a terrible letter came - - he was dying of lung cancer. His last letters were filled with fear, not for himself but for Aika and the two little girls. He had been saving to send them to school in America, but his hospital bills were taking everything. What would become of them?

Then Edith knew that her last gift to Carl could be peace of mind. And what would she do? She wrote him and she said, "Send the girls to me. I will

take care of them, I will see that they get schooling." And then after a while Aika could not be separated from the girls that she had brought into this world and she wrote of the pain of her separation. And Edith said, "Alright, Aika, you come and I'll make a home for you as well."

Edith was an extraordinary woman -- who had learned to live not just somehow, but to live triumphantly ! Said she, "I prayed for Carl to come back. Well, he did -- in his two little daughters, and in this gentle girl that he loved. I asked God to give me the strength to love them too."

Could you have done the same?

Could you have loved as much?

No. Not by yourself. But by the power of the triumphant Christ you and I can deal with life triumphantly.

This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

(1)

That -- that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ -- will give you spiritual wisdom -- that you may realize how great is the hope of which He is calling you -- the magnificence and splendor of the inheritance promised to Christians -- and how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God -- that power is the same divine energy which was demonstrated in Christ when He raised Him from the dead - - - " Ephesians 1:19-20

G.B. Phillips when translating this passage, made a great and good reference, as he understood it, as to why Paul wrote the entire letter in the first place -- a little believed by some

echelon to have been a circular letter intended to be read and passed on from one congregation to another -- copied and re-copied as necessary -- so that the widest distribution could be made -- in order that the readers and all to whom the message would be given would see "that their lives are lived on a level worthy of the staggering privilege that God has given them"

On occasion when I have read certain letters or talked with certain people I have gotten the impression that what was being written or said was being communicated under the pressure of time that was running out. As though

the person was coveting for himself or herself the fact that there was so much to be said and so little time in which to say it -- so in God's sense a measure of economy would be exercised -- so wasting or dabbling in trivia -- speaking directly and concisely to what needed to be said - hoping and trusting that if not then - eventually ultimately - the message would get through -- this whole business that we've encountered at one point or another that someone was trying desperately to tell us something!

Inescapably that is the ugly name of it that we have been called to be pastors see our relationship to the people for whom God has given us a measure of responsibility.

Incidentally, you will go on remembering, won't you - the definition of a pastor that I've worked out for you: God's particular person to a particular people in a particular place for a particular purpose -- and that purpose is essentially to introduce the God-factor in their relationship -- the eternal dimension -- so that people would achieve their potential according to the grace bestowed upon them.

That is the theme -- the lodestar -- for any pastor worthy of having holy hands placed in blessing.

And that is never more evident than when a pastor prays for the people for whom God has given ~~Him~~ him charge.

(3)

So we deal with this text -- it really is a prayer -- not a sermon -- not an essay -- but a pastor-at-large remembering before the Throne of Grace the people whom he had touched in God's name -- and the prayer is illustrative of the great thing he cared enough for them that he wanted them to have the very best. The great danger that besets so many of us lies in our unwillingness or inability to make the most of what is available to us. We become blind, for whatever reason, to what we can - should - or ought to be.

The words of the text were a prayer -- as Paul writes to his Christian friends -- I am praying for you.

(2)

And that would have been a comforting thought --

prayer walk up to you - shake your hand - unite your wills -

visit you when you are sick or deeply troubled - and

will say in parting - if not before - "you are in our prayers" -

or "I am praying for you". Courtesy, if not sheer

gratitude, keeps us from asking an occasion: and for what

are you asking God to give me?

Paul didn't wish for them to be kept in the dark

as to what he was praying for as he thought of those young

Christians first in Ephesus - then in ~~Philippi~~ Philippi --

then in Colossae -- he spelled it out -- "grant them",

he was asking in effect - "the gift of spiritual insight --

(1) = made them to see" --

ET 3/55 - 182 "Make them to see" -- it was Paul's prayer for the John + Kent Christians of Ephesus but not for them alone. For his brethren (section) in Philippi he was anxious and he offered the same petition for them that they might clearly discern the things that were vital. He was concerned for the Church at Colosse and again he besought for them the gift of spiritual insight.

[A bit later. Here were young churches, newly born, assailed by a paganism that threatened to divide their life, corrupt their faith and pervert their virtue. What defence could be thrown around them to give their young life a chance to grow? That was Paul's problem.

But it is the concern of every minister with young Christians to guard, guide, and nourish in the faith.

[Paul's answer is quite emphatic. No external protection would avail. The only safeguard for these children in the faith was the gift of spiritual insight. Let them see the landscape of the new world into which they had been born; let them discern the range and penetration of the love that had rescued them; let them apprehend with heart and mind the grace that had called them out of darkness into light — that would secure, unite, and strengthen them in the face of the world's hostility.

[This was true of Paul's converts; and it has always been

true.

I can imagine that the supreme desire of men and women gripped by the love of God and surrendering to it would be to know it ever more fully. But it has not been so. All too easily men's allegiance has been diverted, their fellowship has been broken, their moral power weakened because they have not been fired with a burning desire to search out the vast expanses of the Kingdom. 'Make them to see!'

Now, says Paul, the point at which this spiritual insight receives its greatest illumination is the resurrection of Jesus. The clue to what has happened to you, so he tells his Ephesian friends, is to be found in the power that wrote death impotent. Oh, that God would give you the power to see ~~the~~ exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who

(10) believe.

[That is the good news -- the goodness of Jesus is ours - His moral energy can be transmitted to us and His character reproduced in us -

: I want to be like Jesus; cried Augustine, when the new life began to stir in him. 'God make me like Jesus'. And God could and did answer his prayer.

- - " For too many of us have given up the hope of having Christ's character reproduced in us. The sad plight of the world has intimidated us. Our own repeated failures have appalled us. The tragedy is not that so many of us have abandoned these hopes but that we are reconciled to it.

(11)

After all we say to describe that power, it is inadequate. Let us be realistic and sensible about it and become content with what is within our power.

Of course, there is truth in it. We are mortal and in consequence limits are set to our moral attainments. But we can know what those limits are. See those great men and women of Christian story. They believed, and a greater measure of Christ-likeness was possible for them than they had ever dreamed! "Impossible?" said Richard Cobden, when they scorned his attempts to have the Corn Laws repealed. "Impossible? If that is all that is in the matter, let us move on! Theme on us! On our knees, and repeat Paul's prayer for ourselves: 'Let God's power in!'"

(12)

[Wilbur Chapman, the great American evangelist, once encountered General Booth and asked him the secret of the great movement he had started and sustained. His reply, the general said – 'God asked and I gave Him all there was of me --- from the day I got the poor of London on my heart, and a vision of what Christ could do for them, I made up my mind that God should have all there was of William Booth."]

"THE SHARP EDGE OF LIFE"

I Peter 2:19-20

O GOD, We make so little time to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to the preaching of Your word. Grant that now, in this time and in this place, we may listen attentively, by the help of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

He was the kind of man, had he not gone into the ministry, who would by this time have been a millionaire once or twice over. It was quite a struggle for him to make the decision, but the Lord Jesus Christ won out. He became a minister of the Church.

He had reason to believe, of course, that he had made the right decision. For several years everything went along swimmingly -- he could see the smile of God's favor on every hand. Then -- was it the fifth year, I've forgotten just what year it was -- they had the birth of their first child, a child the mother was never able to cradle in her arms, for she died shortly thereafter.

The man who had given his life to the Lord as a minister, thinking perhaps that he had made a sacrifice in order to do it, found himself walking in the garden one night behind the house, with clenched fist raised against the heavens, saying, "God! -- I don't deserve this! How could you have done this to me?"

Will you listen carefully now while I read this for you. The chapter was written before the day when we had disposable hypodermic needles. It's a page out of the real drama which is life itself.....

"A distinguished doctor was at work in the ward of a hospital. A nurse, nearby, was cleaning a hypodermic syringe, pointing it upward. She held it by the barrel, forgetting to hold the needle also. As she energetically worked the piston, the

needle flew off and passed into the doctor's eye. It is the eye he used for his specialized work with a microscope. The sight is irrevocably lost."

That could be at the other end of the spectrum. And in between, now, you could write your own pages - - of incidents that have occurred in the lives of people whom you know.....pages in your own life, of the untoward, the ugly, the unexpected. And in your judgment, and perhaps in the judgment of other people, the undeserved blow. What do you make of it?

The title for today's sermon is "The Sharp Edge of Life"- - the text, from First Peter, the second chapter, verses 19 and 20. I'll read two different translations for you. First, the old King James version:

> " . . . For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God . . . "

....now as dramatic as any interpretation of these words is the way the Living Bible puts it:

> " . . . Praise the Lord if you are punished for doing right! Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong; but if you do right and suffer for it, and are patient beneath the blows, God is well pleased . . . "

Who in the world likes a text like that? None of us.

There are certain passages of Scripture to which we respond very favorably, without any reluctance - -

> "Him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out . . . "
>
> ....that strikes favor with all of us. We're even wicked enough to think that it gives us a bit of leeway. But in the meantime we can sow any amount of wild oats, and then perhaps in a moment of true remorse we'll turn to Him and He will take us in - - - small wonder that a text like that has appeal!

...or this one:

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee . . "

...who doesn't get tired - - who doesn't get weary - - who doesn't respond willingly to a passage of Scripture that promises a burden-bearing God? It's wonderful!

...or how about this one — maybe some of you may be hearing it for the first time, but it's Scripture, alright:

"I have been young, and I have been old. Never have I seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed going hungry."

...great day! to respond with enthusiasm to a text like that! - - to believe that no matter what happens, God will always take care of you!

Well, such passages, you see, have their appeal. But to read a passage like this in the Bible — expect to get punished if you do wrong — expect to be praised for being punished, because you've done the right thing!

Well, let me tell you something. You've got to recognize the historical setting for this text. The Apostle Peter was living at a time when Christians, because they believed in Jesus Christ and because they thought they were doing the right thing, were dragged through the streets behind the chariots until their bones were broken.....that's how they ended up because they were doing the right thing. The Apostle Peter was speaking to Christians who, because they were doing the right thing by having complete faith and trust in their Lord and Saviour, would be taken and thrown before the lions in the arena until they were torn to bits, and the ground was bloodied.

The Apostle Peter was speaking to Christians who, because they were firm in their faith, because they were doing the right thing, had their bodies dipped in oil, made secure to a post, and then ignited, to serve as torches in the

garden of the emperor. And Peter says to such people: "When this happens to you, praise God!"

I suppose some of us ought to sit back and evaluate our whole Christian education thrust again. You know what we're doing with boys and girls, don't you? As a Christian parent you do it with your child in the home -- you talk about reward and punishment - - - do the right thing and God will take care of you.....obey the Commandments and you will be blessed - - disobey them, and you'll be punished. That's what we teach them. So it's a great jolt to some people to discover that they've tried to please God, theyve tried to do the right thing, but life deals them a terrible blow.

By this time you've come to understand, of course, that the thrust of this sermon deals with pain and suffering, the undeserved kind.....

> ...any kid knows if his mother told him not to eat those green apples and he went on eating those green apples, the price that he pays by way of punishment, with a severe stomach-ache....
>
> ...any kid used to know that if his father told him not to smoke, and one day he would get himself a nice big cigar and went to town on it, the price that he paid! the price that he paid sometimes so well that he never again reached for a cigar -- his first and only one.

Anyone knows that kind of thing. But the kind of suffering that you and I are called upon to endure, to which we ourselves have not contributed, in order to be a recipient of pain -- that's the baffling thing.

And I suppose I could hasten to tell you that while I'm talking about suffering now, the undeserved kind, I'm not talking simply in terms of physical pain. There is the anguish of the mind, and there is the burden of the soul that you and I have to carry, that we say is undeserved. We have not contributed to it. Honestly we haven't.

Well now, what can I say to you?

I think there are several things as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that I can tell you, and one is: We happen to live in a world where anything can happen, and frequently it does. As if anything that can happen can be either good or bad, and you and I are part of the world and we get caught up with it. That's the first thing. We don't live in a world where we're under a giant-like umbrella that keeps us immune to the untoward blows of life.

The second thing that I can tell you is this: don't waste your energy trying to figure out why you have to endure a pain that you know full well you don't deserve. You just can't figure it out. There is such a thing as mystery in this world, and you and I have to deal with it. There is the mystery of undeserved pain.....but I hasten to tell you, on the other side of the coin there's the mystery of undeserved good! I was fairly ecstatic yesterday when I realized that you and I could live in a world as perfectly beautiful as yesterday. And to think that upon us has come today, a perfectly beautiful day, when the whole created world surrounds us with beauty. There is such a thing as the mystery of the goodness that surrounds us.

Have you ever thought to think that when a child is brought into this world, he comes into a world that's waiting to receive him -- upon which he can draw on the bounty that's been set up in his behalf. Did it ever occur to you that when you and I came into this world there wasn't a single thing that we could do for ourselves by way of having our needs met? God has raised up those who were waiting to care for us.

I have not been hesitant to share with you pages of my own life. I marvel at times when I think of those whom God has raised up to love me, to be good to me. My life is just one chapter after another of blessings that have been channeled into it from other people. And when I have my moments that I spend with some of my colleagues in the ministry, I'm constrained to fall upon my

knees and thank God that I am the one who is privileged to be your Pastor. When I think of the things that they say about their congregations, when I think of some of the things that they say about their people! But for two decades I have been the fortunate one to know your love and your respect -- undeserved! -- the blessing that you bring into my life. This is the kind of thing that every single one of us could write for himself. There is the mystery of the good that comes to us.

And if that isn't enough to stagger your mind -- think of the goodness of God! - - that while we were yet sinners, Jesus Christ came to us to reconcile us to God.....think of that precious word that's in the vocabulary of the Christian: grace -- undeserved favor. None of us could ever be good enough to get to Heaven. We have at the hand of God what we have because His hand is outstretched, and always kindly disposed toward us. Talk about a mystery, you try to figure that out!

And the third thing that I can tell you is this. Jesus Christ endured pain. Jesus Christ sacrificed His life -- endured it, and that's why we love Him. That's why we believe in the Resurrection -- because He died triumphantly. What is the acid test of life? -- not by what you avoid. The acid test of life is what you're able to endure. What is our purpose in being here, except to develop character! And no one ever develops character the easy way out. Character is always developed by what we can endure. Because God wants us to be the best possible of all characters He's always saying to us, "I will help you - - I will never leave you - - I will never forsake you." He put us in a world where anything can happen, and frequently it does, and He says, "My grace shall be sufficient."

Well, you pay your money and you take your choice, my friend. You cannot doubt. You can try to avoid it, you can t-y to escape it. You won't succeed for very long. There just isn't any detour around the thing that you may have to face. But by the grace of God you can endure.

If you don't want to believe it because I'm telling it to you, if you have your moments when you think that God has done nothing but smile benignly upon me all the days of my life and I don't know what hardship and struggle is - - well, if you want to discredit my word on that score, then for heaven's sake, believe the Apostle Peter! It's the testimony out of his own life. He knew! Take their word for it. That's what I'm trying to do.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor David Shaheen
The Fifth Sunday of Easter - Festival of the Christian Home - May 8, 1977

"THE ENCOURAGING WORD" Ephesians 6:4

His name was Benjamin West. That may not be a name that you recognize. In fact it could be that you walk by some of the things that he's done and hardly paid any attention to the sign....plaque....or that which designated to whom the credit ought to be given. But some of his works hang in the National Gallery of Art. He's one of the greatest painters that the 18th Century ever produced.

He became famous because of the work that he did in painting portraits. How do you suppose it is that Benjamin West got his start? or how any painter could have gotten the feel that he did for artistic talent? Well, in Benjamin West's case it happened one day while he was taking care of his little sister Sally while his mother went out on an errand.

In his mother's absence he found some bottles of colorad ink, and so he decided to paint his sister's portrait.....and in the process, as you might surmise, he made quite a mess of the kitchen. And when his mother returned she said nothing about the droppings of ink that were on the floor, and she didn't mention anything about the mess that was on the table. But she walked over to her son Benjamin, and she picked up the paper on which he was working, and she said, "Why, it's Sally!" -- and then she bent over and kissed him on the forehead. And in later years Benjamin West recalled, "My mother -- my mother's kiss, that day, made me a painter."

Each of us no doubt has had a moment or two in our life, for we are shaped, we are fashioned by those whom we love and those who love us. But sometimes the results are not always the same. For Benjamin West turned out the way that he did because of his mother's reacting the way that she did. It could be that she could have reacted differently. And what do you suppose,

them, would have happened to the talent that was about to unfold in the man who became known as one of the greatest painters the 18th Century ever produced?

I honestly confess to you that there are certain times that a pastor's heart breaks. And I confess that to you on a Sunday that is set aside in the Christian church as a national holiday to mark the Festival of the Christian Home, because there are some things that I deal with that make me very sad. For I know that not every home is a place that's a happy place. And I know that there are homes where children and parents do not live together in harmony.....and I know that there are homes where people live under the same roof but there is little respect for one another. And yet we profess a religion that places a great deal of emphasis on the family. And we concern ourselves a great deal about the responsibility that falls to parents about the way they raise their children.....and we spend a great deal of time concerning ourselves about the reasons why some children have a harder family life than others. For we have come to value life dearly, and particularly the life of a little child.

But that's not the way it's always been. There was a period in the history of the world, in fact during the Roman Empire, when there existed what was referred to as the Patria Potestas -- the power of the father -- which had certain features that you and I would find quite repulsive. The father had the absolute power over his family, and that power was so strong and so great that he could sell his children as slaves....he could make them work in the fields bound together by chains.....and if he really wanted to, he could inflict punishment as severe as capital punishment! And believe it or not, the power of a Roman father over his family extended over the child as long as the father lived! The child really never came of age until his father died.

There also existed in that time of the Roman Empire the custom of child disposal -- that when a child was born it was placed before its father's feet. As the father stooped and picked up the child, that meant that he wished the child to be kept.....but if the father turned and walked away, it meant -- literally -- the child could be thrown away. It was into this kind of a world that the Apostle Paul tried to introduce Christianity.

If ever it was asked what good Christianity has done to the world, we only have to point to the kind of change that was made in the status of women and children, through the high priority that it places on family life. And the Apostle Paul spoke very directly every now and then about the kind of relationship that should exist between parents and their children, and about the way members of a family should treat one another.

So, on this day as we celebrate the Festival of the Christian Home, I find this verse of Scripture claiming my heart -- not an easy one, I have to admit, when I first looked at it, to think about. But in a letter that Paul wrote to certain Christians living in his day, he wrote these words:

> "Parents, never drive your children to resentment or you will make them feel frustrated . . ."

...that's the way it's written in the Jerusalem Bible.

I looked it up in a couple of other translations as well. J. B. Phillips translates it this way:

> "Parents, don't over-correct your children, or you will take all the heart out of them."

And in the Today's English Version it's put like this:

> "Parents, don't irritate your children or they will become discouraged."

Now I've admitted to you that there are some things that I immediately wanted to take issue with when I read these words of Paul. But then I thought about the background to which they were written. And I know his motivation was

to encourage parents to think about their responsibilities and the relationships they had with their children. And I was reminded about the young boy in school who was asked to fill out a questionnaire, and the first line asked for his father's or his guardian's name and he filled it out and put in his father's name. But the second line asked for 'Relationship' and the little boy wrote "Very Good." And that's exactly what the Apostle Paul was talking about. He was concerned about tempering the relationships of parents and their children in his day so that it would be "very good."

...that meant urging parents to set some limitations

...that meant urging parents to be patient, persistent --

exercising a measure of self-control.

...for the Apostle Paul knew in his day, as some people keep telling us today, that a child if he's constantly berated will develop no self-confidence at all, and gain no measure of self-esteem.

Do you know it's a fact that some children never hear a compliment! In a survey recently conducted by the American Institute of Family Relations, mothers were asked to record the number of times they made negative and positive comments to their children. They found that they criticized ten times more than they gave a favorable comment. And one conclusion of the study was that it takes four positive comments to offset the effects of one negative statement to a child. To paraphrase an old saying, "An ounce of praise can accomplish more than a ton of fault-finding." And Martin Luther said,"'Spare the rod and spoil the child' is true - - but beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he's done something good."

I'd like to think that it's a true story, at least I presume that it is, about the little girl who always came to school dirty every day. And her teacher recognized that it was the same dirt day after day. Being kind and understanding as she was, she didn't want to hurt the little girl or embarrass her in

front of her friends. She knew she wasn't getting the kind of attention she should at home - - maybe the parents didn't care, but the teacher knew that she did. So she pulled the little girl aside and said to her, "You know, you have very pretty hands - - why don't you go and wash them so people can see how really beautiful they are." The little girl ran off to do the teacher's bidding, and she came back gleaming and delighted and she held up her hands so very proudly for the teacher to see. And the teacher said, "They're beautiful! You see what a little soap and water can do!" And then she took the little girl up in her arms and she hugged her.

> ...and it's reported that every day after that the little girl came to school a bit cleaner, and eventually she was one of the neatest students in the school.....

And why did she make such a change? - - because the teacher complimented her by praising the good points she improved.

People seldom change because we point out their faults - - nor will they love us for doing so. If we want to help others become beautiful people, then we ought to work at it with sincere praise and encouragement. If we think back, it was probably the kind words of a parent or a teacher or a friend which gave us the self-confidence that we have. If we think back to those moments in our life we went through some kind of identity crisis and it was easy to point when we were severely criticized. True, everything has its place, and there are times when a balance has to be maintained, but contrary to some people's thinking, praising a child doesn't spoil a child. It's the child that doesn't receive praise, especially when he deserves it, who will seek attention in other ways.

What then can I tell you, how to keep this thing in proper focus, on a day that celebrates the Festival of the Christian Home - - what kind of guidelines might I suggest for parents in praise of praise?

Well, for one thing, you might find it helpful to keep in mind to praise a child for what he's responsible for rather than that which he cannot help. A child can't help it if he has dark wavey hair....a girl can't help it if she has beautiful brown eyes. And to praise a child for such things could bring on a pride and concait. But to praise a child for acts of kindness -- to praise a child for acts of generosity - - - the child begins to feel that his life counts, it has worth and meaning.

A second thing - - to recognize the praise that is especially needed from the people who are important to a child. And what can be more important to a child than his parents? When a parent praises a child, a child knows love, a child feels secure. I heard a young man tell me one time that it didn't make any difference to him what other people said about the kind of things that he did, but he said, "When my dad talked to me one time and said 'It's a job well done' - - my whole world changed!" I've seen it happen to teenagers -- they blossom -- they come out when people encourage them, and shyness disappears, and they begin to develop a measure of independance. They, too, become generous, and cooperative.

What else can I tell you about praising children? Well the third thing I can say to you is to praise them sincerely. For children cannot be fooled! And praise dare not be phoney, and flattery will fall flat. For as Mark Twain, I think it was, said, "I can live two months on a good, sincere compliment."

The fourth thing - - praise a child for what he does on his own. To do something without being told definitely deserves some special encouragement. But to balance that we ought to keep in mind that parents should be quick to praise those who don't always accomplish what they set out to accomplish. You know in every race, everyone's the loser but one. And to compliment somebody who's tried, and yet lost, encourages them to keep trying. Provide for them

the kind of encouragement that they need when later on they face those kinds of difficult situations that come to every one of us.

There is one last thing I would tell you -- to remember that a parent's attitudes are just as important as their words. The way a parent stops what he's doing to listen, the way a parent shares in the success or the failure of their child, the tone of a parent's voice -- all those help to create an atmosphere. If anyone needs to hear this sermon this morning, I do, because I know I'm guilty of everything that I've mentioned. Even last night when Christopher came into the house, and he was late, and his mother and I wanted him to get upstairs and get his bath and get into bed....he wanted to stop and tell me something about a squirrel that he'd found out in the parking lot yesterday that got hurt, and he put it in a box on the porch and wanted to take care of it. I didn't know that's what he wanted to tell me, and I berated him for fooling around and wasting time trying to get upstairs....

....and then I could hear him crying.....I went after him.

I knew that he was really hurt because not only the tone of my voice but because I didn't take the time to hear what was important to him. So it is with praise.

Someone once said that no one, great or obscure, is untouched by genuine appreciation. We have a double necessity to be commended and to know how to command. When someone's deprived of self-esteem, he's deprived of the one thing that makes a person worth loving. For one's own benefit, if for no other reason, the effort should be made to build the self-esteem in the other. And that's achieved not by flattery, not by a generous appreciation of the other's strength -- it's achieved by speaking of the person's good points....and de-emphasizing the weaknesses as much as possible.

I read a quote one time that I hope I'll never forget. It went something like this: "People who are good to each other make each other good."

* * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

"A DRAMA OF RUINED HOPES"
(Deuteronomy 34:4)

Dcut 34.4

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Let me begin by reading for the extract for today's sermon as it appeared on the front page of the current issue of the MESSENGER:

> *" . . . come now, let the question be put again: does life ever work out exactly as we had hoped, as we had planned, as we had dreamed? Does not one hear again and ever so often the sad cry of those who had it all, so it would seem, within grasp only to have it slip from beyond their reach? What now shall we make of the shadows that fall so easily and with alarming frequency upon our way? . . . "*

This is the extract from a sermon "A Drama of Ruined Hopes" that's about to be preached.

Do you really want to hear the sermon? What now was your immediate reaction? Does the extract smack of cynicism, and despair? frustration? Would you want me to go ahead and give you the illustration that first comes to my mind upon Scripture, of my friend Jay McCoy? You would have liked Jay very much. He was a rare spirit. He's the kind of person that anybody would list in his catalogue of "Unforgettable Characters."

Jay was in the printing business. He had four sons. He moved from place to place, always having the dream that some day he could buy a plot of ground and on that plot of ground he'd build an ideal print shop. Year after year passed, but the dream remained in his heart, and then when he reached 60 years of age they had that plot of ground and they built that ideal print shop.

They had some of the finest machinery that's been produced -- some purchased here, some purchased from abroad. The plant was all set to go. They moved in. Jay was the last to leave the building. He locked the door. He went

home. Knowing Jay as I remember him, I'm reasonably certain that that night he said "Thank you, God -- I've lived for this day, and now the dream is there. Thank you!"

But Jay McCoy died of a heart attack in his sleep. He never went back to the shop. He never heard the presses operate. He never saw his sons firmly established in the business as his successor....

...do you want me to tell you about life in that fashion?

...do you want me to keep repeating to you that life is to be seen as a drama of ruined hopes? Is that the way it is?

Well, that's the title for today's sermon, and maybe it's not an apt one. But hear now the text. But before I read the text you're given to understand, honestly now, that according to good Lutheran preaching, no sermon ought ever to be preached without a text, and no text ought ever to be dealt with in its isolation. It must always be considered within its context. And maybe that's why, if you don't mind, before I read the text I'd like to read you something that's part of the context.

The chief character in today's sermon is a man named Moses, and Moses, as you may remember, was the leader of the Children of Israel. This is the way his life ended -- it's recorded in the final chapter in the Book of Deuteronomy, and there is a verse that goes like this:

> "And Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His vision did not grow dim, and his natural strength was not abated . . . "

...a free translation of that verse would be this: he died in full possession of all his faculties. He was virile....he was vigorous. He had perfect vision, he was in perfect health. What now caused his death? Why did he die? -- if he was in such excellent physical shape?

Well now I have to read for you the text, the 4th verse of the 34th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy -- get the setting: God has the leader of the people,

now, and He has him in a place where he's looking out over the promised land, the land toward which he had led his people. And God says to him: "Look, Moses, I have called you to see it with your eyes, but you will not go over." .....now that's the text for today's sermon.

See it properly, I beg you.

At eighty years of age he leads the Children of Israel wandering through the wilderness. He had a rough time of it. They had their moments when they criticized him severely, they even told him they would have been far better off if he would never have taken them out of bondage.

> ...well that's understandable. Any people who get a measure of freedom find how difficult the emerging process is as they have to assume responsibility for themselves - - wish for the day when they were in bondage, when somebody else had all the worries, when somebody else could make all the decisions.....

Well they gave Moses a mighty rough time.

And it wasn't a very easy task that he had to fashion them into a people, and to keep them cohesive, to deal with all their troublesome elements, but he did. And the grand and glorious thing is that he never lost sight of the vision that he was the leader of a people who were heading for the promised land - - he never lost sight of that.

And now God brings him to the promised land and He says, "Here it is, Moses - - look at it! But, Moses, this is as far as you go. As far as you're concerned - - " (a free translation would be) - - "Moses, the game is called on account of darkness....the curtain is going to be lowered. As far as your part in the drama is concerned, it's finished. This is it! There's the Promised Land, but for you, Moses, I'm putting up a sign that reads 'NO ADMITTANCE' - - " Now that's the way it was.

The same chapter from which this text is taken says that Moses was 120 years

old when he died...."and his vision did not grow dim, and his natural strength was not abated . . . " Now, why did he die? What caused his death?

Even though you may not be trained in the medical profession, you might quickly say, well, he died of a heart attack -- that's the only explanation you can give if he was in such perfect health. Well, suppose that's true, then what caused the heart attack?

....well you can pay your money and you can take your choice, my friend.....you can have two choices.....

- - from a purely human perspective, it's not too much to suggest that he was disappointed. The work was too much for him, and he suddenly found himself taking issue with God and saying, "God, you're unfair! How could you do this to me? You kept me believing that the promised land would be ours - - you kept me to the task, and I didn't fail you, God, because here I am! I've brought them to the very edge of the Promised Land. God, how could you deal such a frustrating blow to me?".....it may be all of a sudden Moses may have said to himself, it wasn't worth it - - "You're unfair, God - - "...and he died because the shock was so great! The cynicism ate out the very core of his being.

....well, you can read it that way, my friend, honestly you can, because some people do. And when life casts a shadow upon them and a frustrating blow, they cry out and say, "God, you're unfair! You had no right to do this to me!" And their lives begin to deteriorate and the become worthless.

Well, you can read it that way. But I wouldn't if I were you. I wouldn't buy it. To the contrary I'm going to suggest to you something drastically different, because I'm inclined to give it to you and in duty bound to give it to you from the Christian perspective.

Moses is brought to the edge of the Promised Land, and God says, "Take a look

at it, Moses" -- and Moses can hardly believe what he sees. It's far greater than anything he had ever imagined -- a land flowing with milk and honey! A measure of ecstasy possesses him -- "God, I gave you credit for many good things, and I always believed that what you said was true. But, God, this far surpasses anything that my mind ever envisioned -- God, you've come through! -- God, it's been worth it! For this we've striven. Thank you, God --

> " . . . and, God, what is more, I look back over the days of my years and I remained faithful to you. And when they clamored against me I did my best to contain them for you. I'm glad,now, God, that the record is as it was! I can hardly believe that you allowed this to happen in and through me! Of all the people on the face of the earth you chose me! And, God, you and I together -- we've pulled it off!"
>
> (I dare you to read it that way!)
>
> " . . . And now, God, that I can see it, it's more than I can take! My soul cannot contain the grandeur and the glory!"

...that's why, I say, he had the heart attack -- because it was as wonderful as all that, and he was able to see it. Stick with it that way, won't you?

> ...and in addition to all that, he was able to say, "God, I've done my part, and I've trained a man to come after me. I was willing to believe you, and I agreed with your choice of Joshua, and I'm pleased to know now that I've come this far, but you and your work go on! -- and Joshua takes over. Thank you, God!"

...read it that way, my friend. The risk is far too great to read it any other way, so why don't you re-title the sermon for me? Don't call it, "Drama of Ruined Hopes." Put it this way: "Life is More Than a Drama of Ruined Hopes." Robert Frost was only partly right when he said, with a measure of resignation that may leave some people with a measure of despair, "You must always think of

life in terms of unfinished business." But it's not a fair thing to think that God is always saying to us, "Your record is incomplete, and I'm not going to give you a chance to finish it." God is the God of perfection, and His work goes on. Think of it that way.

Moses was a part of it, a certain chapter, and he did what had to be done. You've got to read the life of Jesus Christ that way. Don't say at thirty-three years of age His was an untimely death. Jesus Christ, from a divine perspective, was able to say, "The work that I was given to do -- this chapter -- is finished." But the work of Jesus Christ was not complete then. The deed of redemption was done in our behalf, but the work of Jesus Christ goes on. That's why we're here today - - - in a far greater sense than when the work was going on when He walked around in Judea and Galilee.

Be patient with me when I share this personal testimony. Both of my parents are now in glory. They lived to a ripe old age, of course they did, and had they been in possession of their faculties I would have been very happy if they could have continued to stay on. But God translated them to His nearer presence. But I can honestly tell you this, not that I didn't appreciate them when I had them . . . but in a very <u>real</u> sense, their influence on my life is even greater now, today, than when I could sit down and talk with them. What I'm simply saying to you - - even though they finished their earthly pilgrimage it does not say that their life was incomplete. Every good and noble thing that they did when they lived they continue to do in Heaven above.

I have to tell you this, the measure of a man's life is not by what he's able to achieve. And that doesn't mean that I minimize the necessity for having a goal. But many a man who has achieved what he set out to achieve began to rest on his laurels, and his sweetness turned sour. For some people, they

think life would be a success if they had a certain bank balance. Howard Hughes had a tremendous bank balance, but what kind of a character was he? The measure of life in God's sight, from a Christian perspective, is not the goal that's achieved . . . it's the kind of a person you become in the process. And that's the thing that you have to remember.

One final thought, if you don't mind. Moses died -- facing the promised land. Moses died with a forward look. . . .

" . . let me die working,
still tackling plans unfinished, tasks undone,
clean to its end;
Swift may my race be run, nor lagging steps,
nor faltering, nor shirking --
Let me die working.
Let me die thinking,
Let me fare forth still with an open mind,
the fresh secrets to unfold;
New truths to find -- my soul undimmed,
alert, no questions blinking...
Let me die thinking."

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ENOUGH BY WHICH TO SHARE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

John 6: 1-

Winifred and I happen to live in a neighborhood where there are a number of youngsters, and I dare say that some of them are sheer joy to have around. With two of them we are also fortunate to have a very special relationship. And occasionally, thanks to the gracious quality of their parents, we're permitted to have some part in their spiritual growth and development.

Among other things there are those moments when I can tell them a Bible story. And I've discovered something . . . that telling a Bible story just as it is in the Good Book doesn't always satisfy. One of them especially wants a little embellishment, a little enhancement, and by that I mean he wants me to read between the lines and not read it just us the Bible has it, but to give it to him in a story fashion.

Now that's quite an assignment, because I know that one has to be true to the text. But one can't allow himself too much liberty with the Biblical statement as it happens to be on the printed page. So I find myself in that very difficult position sometimes of praying to God for the gift of a sanctified imagination, that I may satisfy a desire to hear about Bible stories, that I can read these stories for him but giving him a bit of filler between the lines. It's not easy, but it's a challenge.

And in light of that I want to share today's sermon with you. Let me read it for you just as it is - - it's from the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

" . . After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased. Jesus went up into the hills, and there sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, *"How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?"* This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" Jesus said, *"Make the people sit down."* Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, *"Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost."* So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"

Now, he'll listen fairly well when I read it to him just as I've read it for you. But he wants more. He just isn't satisfied at this stage for me to say to him, "Well, that's the way Jesus did it. That was a miracle."

Oh, of course he's fascinated that five thousand people could be fed, and I suppose as long as God gives him memory he'll remember this miracle, and if he's asked to name miracles at any time, it will always be in the top four or five - - the fascination, the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand -- just the number itself appeals to a youngster. But he wants more than that, and he just isn't satisfied when I say to him, "Well, that's the way Jesus did it - - it was a miracle."

Well maybe you're that way too, and maybe that's one reason why you don't pay too much attention to miracles - - you're not satisfied to have somebody say, well it was a miracle! Human as we are, we want something more. Now will you indulge me this morning as I deal, I hope not too recklessly, with an inter-

pretation of this passage, because in your presence I am going to read between the lines, and I want to emphasize as strongly as I can that even God may have His moments when He can't work a miracle without the assistance of human instrumentality.

Now there are times, of course there are, when God can do things all by Himself, like a convulsion of nature - - the earthquake, the wind and the fire. But the miracle that has meaning for us like as not always involves human instrumentality. And you and I need to keep that in mind.

Even that great miracle, when God was able to come to earth and take on human form - - you and I have no hope of salvation if it weren't for Jesus Christ. But even in order to have Jesus Christ, when God works the miracle of the Incarnation, He reaches for a man and a woman - - and Mary and Joseph become human instruments. You've got to remember this.

Now having said that, let me focus here and there upon the human instrumentality used by God in the performance of this miracle....

> ...I like to think about those people who came out to hear Jesus preach. He was a great preacher. He held people in the hollow of his hand as He gave them unforgettable pictures of God. No one has ever preached as He did. What did He tell them about God?
>
> -- that God loved them
>
> -- that God was great, that God was good -- He was great in His goodness and good in His greatness
>
> -- whenever He would exercise power He'd exercise it because of His love for people!

....this is the kind of thing He talked about when He talked about God to these people.....and of how their lot in life could be improved if only they'd <u>remember</u> that they were here to live out the days of their years in a way that would please Him. And they weren't meant to ignore the God-factor or to have disrespect for the eternal dimension. Well, I'd like to think that as He was

preaching there were some people who were moved. He struck a responsive chord, and like as not there were some people who said, Now as soon as I can I'm going to do something about this - - I'm not going to be content to be a person who just listens and nods his head and says that's great -- bravo! I'll demonstrate my belief by my behavior, and put my creed into practice!

> ....I'd like to think that that was happening when He was preaching, and that His preaching was so effective that it had this kind of results....

....now this is part of the human instrument that I'm talking about. People were moved. They said, we've got to be part of the picture if this better, brighter world that He's talking about is ever to become a reality then some of us have to do something about it! . . .

> ...now don't ignore that aspect of it.

But I'd like to believe that when that mother packed that little boy's lunch that day, she may have said to him, "Now I can't go with you. But I know you're going to like Him. I heard Him not so long ago, and He's changed my life. Listen for me, will you? I'm glad you can go. Now I'm packing your lunch - - you know we don't have much . . . "

> (90% of the people in that day didn't have much -- that's why the situation was so critical, most of them were suffering from malnutrition anyway, and they'd listen to Him preach and then they had a great distance to travel, and they'd faint by the wayside....you remember it, this related data to this miracle)

....well anyway, the little boy's mother said, "We don't have much, but I'm going to pack your lunch for you. But I want you to remember one thing - - - while you may not have much, you have enough that you can share with somebody

else. And if you come across somebody who needs something, remember to give him a little bit of what you have. You don't have much, but you have enough that you can share."

> . . . I'd like to believe that this was part of this human instrumentality that Jesus Christ was able to depend upon, to draw upon, when this miracle became effective. So remember her and her kind -- the mother who motivated the youngster to share.

And as part of this human instrumentality picture, pay attention now to Jesus . . as He stood there and looked around these people and His eye fell upon this youngster. And He didn't ignore him. This, too, is part of the picture. He didn't allow Himself to believe that this youngster was incapable of helping out. There was potential, there was a resource that could be tapped, right now.

And I can't help but tell you, and I hope you've discovered every now and then in your conversation with me - - I thrill to high heaven to be the pastor of a congregation where young people are demonstrating their faith -- now. And we tell this to them when we meet with them in different ways: You don't have to wait to be forty years of age until you can be a Christian, the full-fledged Christian. We try to impress upon their minds as they're being confirmed next Sunday: You can practice your Christian faith now - - you have something to offer -- today!

If you come to the Baccalaureate this afternoon you'll sense that dynamic. Some of you know that we have a program called "Care-Ring" around Saint Luke now, which was initiated by Youth Ministry with a concern for older people being carried on to some degree by younger people. When you think of the human instrumentality as part of the picture, part of the performance of that miracle, remember - - Jesus did not discourage the man who said, "Here is a boy - - " But Jesus being pleased, immediately said, "Have him come! Let's

begin with him.!"

And then you have got to remember as part of the human scene, how the little boy, motivated and encouraged, gave up his lunch. It's not easily done - - and it's harder yet for adults to give up what they grasp. But it happened.

And then as part of the human scene, look at it this way. I can see it now . . . how here and there other people, with the little that they had, begin to release their grasp - - they give it up. And the whole scene was one of sharing. Now Jesus had all this in mind from the beginning. The Bible says, "Jesus himself knew what he would do." But He couldn't do it until they began to make themselves available and cooperative. Miracles always begin to happen when people release the little that they have into God's hands.

Two weeks from today we'll have ceremonial groundbreaking....and I go back now and I think of the time when your leadership, representing you, gathered in the Luther Room, and the decision had to be made then: shall we encourage our fellow members - - shall we support this concept of this enlarged facility? - - shall we ask them to participate financially in an undertaking the like of which they have never undertaken before? It was an awesome moment, for your leadership recognizes the responsibility that rests upon them. Then I began to see a miracle take form and substance. One man said something, the like of which I dare say no one else in that group had been thinking, and he indicated the very generous amount that he was willing to pledge, far above the amount that anyone else in that room had contemplated. It was almost like magic - - you could feel the electricity happen as others began to think in terms of the same possibility.....so much so that by the time the appeal was being launched there were others who exceeded that figure, here and there. When you talk about miracles, don't shy away from them. Begin by recognizing the fact that they're possible because God lets them happen - - but - - concentrate

strongly every now and then on the human assistance upon which He draws. Remember - - God doesn't ever perform a miracle by Himself and by Himself alone. Miracles happen when you and I respond to the power of God and allow compassion to rule our hearts as we give ourselves to something bigger and nobler than our little world envisions. It's a willingness to believe in the power of God and to respond in faith.

I want to close by sharing with you something that comes out of Hebrew legend - - now mind you, this is legend. Hebrews used to enjoy telling one another that when God brought the Children of Israel to the banks of the Red Sea and they almost began to panic - - - or did they panic when they realized the Egyptians were coming against them? There were those who believed God miraculously would part the Red Sea for them. But the old legend has it -- the Red Sea never parted until the first Hebrew got his feet wet in the water.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Notes on R.S. Presentation to the
Western Pennsylvania - West Virginia Synod Convention
June 10 - 11, 1977
Thiel College, Greenville, Pennsylvania

Two Addresses on the General Theme:

"CHRIST - THE GIFT TO GIVE"

Matt 22:42

Presentation No. 1

We are known by the questions that we ask or are asked. Not all questions are of equal value. Some answers are easily given. Presumably it is far greater to ask one hard question than to give a hundred easy answers, no matter how correct each answer may be.

Jesus had a way of asking questions. Jesus had a way of evoking questions.

The first of these presentations deals with the question that Jesus asked. The second presentation deals with the question that was raised regarding Jesus. Both questions are as important as any that are considered in the entire New Testament.

Question Number One: WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST? (Matthew 22:42)

It is essential, no matter how much we know about Jesus Christ, that we keep Him in clear and proper focus.

There comes to mind the recollection of a friend who saved his money for the trip of a life-time. It was to be a trip around the world to see and to visit places to which he had never been and to which he would never again return. It was in the days when cameras were not as sophisticated as they are now and the manual focusing was very important. Upon his return from his trip, and after he had taken his films to the processing laboratory, he was distressed to learn that every picture was faulty. The laboratory technician advised him that he had not mastered the art of proper focus adjustment. And

that, too, could be the tragedy for us - - to come to journey's end and never to have had Christ in clear and proper focus....never to be able to give the clear and perfect answer to the question: Who is Jesus Christ?

So again and again we do well to deal with the question -- the question that Jesus Christ himself put to certain people.

Here are some answers, now as then:

-- "Jesus, you are a great preacher" .....and that is about as far as some folks ever get. We remember Him as one who had a way with words. He could preach well -- no question about that. Now as to what He said, and to what end -- they gave little consideration to this. To hear, you see, is not necessarily to heed. As in Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" there was that scene when the folks who inhabited the graveyard got their turn to observe the living, they came unhappily to the conclusion that while they looked at one another, they never really saw one another! To think of Jesus as a great preacher is never enough unless we give heed to His words and become His obedient followers. Fascinated by His preaching? Yes - - but more by how He said it than why He said it. They never got beyond the preaching to the person of the preacher himself, and this is never to see Him in clear focus.

Another answer given historically - - now as then - -

-- "Jesus, you are a miracle-worker" .....and that's about it with some folks. Whether they believe in miracles or not may be beside the point. It is enough that they, when asked about Him, would first relate Him to wonder-works. They shall not ask why or how such things happen. They settle all too easily for the reputation He has established for Himself as a one-man rescue team of a bunch of bewildered folk in a storm-tossed craft....or a one-man supermarket

for an angry multitude. Who are you, Jesus? A miracle-worker. Yet the question remains, what difference would it make to them or in them? Were they changed for the better? Did they see beyond the miracle to the man himself? Fascinated? Yes. But more by what He did, and how, than why He did what He did.

The question remains. Can we answer as some did, as we put our fingers to our lips and reverently whisper the name of God - - "Jesus, You are God -- God's Gift to us." In John 3:16 it is al expressed superbly.

And that's why the observation must be made that John said what he did regarding Christ upon reflection. It was only after Christ had been away from them that John could look back and assess it properly.

It is that way with all that matters most. It is the reflection upon the experience that provides the appreciation for the reality, and that is why it is important that we should do what we are doing now.

When John thought of Jesus he could not separate Him from God. There was this perfect, complete and immediate identification with God. Jesus was not just another man -- no matter how extraordinary. He was Very God of Very God . . . .

....But God, stooping to our level, to find us where we are, to meet their need.

And all this happens because He loves. It is the nature of love to give, it is the nature of love to share, it is the nature of love to meet a need.

So God in Christ meets our need, and Himself supplies the Saviour. We never really see Jesus Christ until we see Him as God - - God's gift. And this is the point at which we must begin when we talk to people about God. It is what He offers to us by which we face the peril and the problems of a wicked world.

Who was it who said, "There is a degree of justice in the charge that Christians, and especially Christian preachers, have grown too fond of analyzing the problems and diagnosing the maladies of the modern world. Their finger is too often upon the pulse of our age. Quite certainly it is our Christian business to know what is ailing. Only as we understand the sickness of our civilization are we able to bring the Gospel with convincing and converting power to bear upon contemporary life. But the danger of diagnosing too much and too often is that we may be mesmerized by the sheer mass of evil that is in the world. When we view the Christian task in all its paralyzing bigness, and then consider the seemingly pitiful resources of which the church disposes, we begin to wonder whether very much can be done to remedy matters. It is only one step farther to a mood of secret or open hopelessness.

"It is therefore good for us Christians, not once but often, to reverse the common order of our thinking: to start not with our Christian responsibilities but with our Christian assets....to begin not with the situation and what it demands of us but what Christianity gives to us that enables the church to face any situation, and therefore the present situation."

So now at this point - - what is it in Christianity that gives the church the power to look at an unredeemed world with all the disturbing elements of evil in it without losing faith and hope?

You and I both know that the thing of transcendental importance is the Gospel -- the Christian message -- the astounding good news that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son - - - it is that God cares. It is that He cares for each of us. He cares for all of us, and He will go on caring forever. Again and again this is the point at which we must begin, with the fact of God. And for us Christians, who reveals Himself fully and completely in Jesus Christ.

James Stewart, one of Scotland's great preachers, in his book "The Strong Name" deals with this very theme. Let me quote him directly:

> " Who is this Jesus? Let us begin our inquiry by setting right in the centre of our minds one fundamental fact: the Christian religion is first and foremost and essentially a message about God. It is not primarily a new ethic. It is not just a gospel of brotherliness and loving our neighbor and accepting the Golden Rule. It is not in the main a philosophy of life or a social programme. Doubtless it includes all that: it involves an ethic, supplies a philosophy, enunciates a programme for society. But basically it is none of these things. It is not a message about human virtues and ideals at all. It is a message about God.
>
> "That message is - that the living God - eternal, invisible, has at one quite definite point broken through history in an unprecedented way. Once and for all, in an actual life lived out upon this earth, God has spoken, and has given the full and final revelation of Himself. In Jesus, God has come.
>
> "Such is the dramatic and astounding statement on which the Christian religion is built. Possibly familiarity has dulled its wonder for us: but will you try to realize afresh just how electrifying, how startling that statement is? God came to us Himself -- a gift!! "

Our purpose in this presentation is simply to make certain that we have in clear and proper focus the reality of Jesus Christ as Very God of Very God -- precious gift of God to us -- to meet the need which we have in common -- to be saved.

* * *

Appendix

To this day when the worshipper goes to St. Martin In The Fields, Trafalgar Square, London, he can sense something of the presence of a distinguished parson who preached there a half-century and more ago - - C. A. Studdert-Kennedy - - a man who knew God first-hand.

"I was alone at night on a moor by the sea. Above me a dark velvet dome and a million stars. Beneath me moving slowly in a heavy swell, the sea. No sound but the rustling of a breeze through the heather, and the boom of the waves against the cliff. I was alone, that is, I was acutely, painfully conscious of myself as a reality, and at the same time even more acutely conscious of that vast, shadowy, mysterious other-than-myself, looming up out of the darkness over against me - the universe - - - Suppose, I cried out to the great other than myself: 'Who goes there?' Would there be an answer? Or would there be nothing but the whisper of the wind on the heather, the boom of the swell on the cliff, and the desolate cry of that lonely gull returning late to its nest?"

Listen to his reply . . .

"Well, I made my cry and I got my answer. I have often doubted it (don't let that shock you) and never entirely understood it, but it remains. If I lost it, I think I would lose my soul. I have been trying to say it ever since - - at the time, the answer was only one word GOD . . . "

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Notes on R.S. Presentation to the
Western Pennsylvania - West Virginia Synod Convention
June 10 - 11, 1977
Thiel College, Greenville, Pennsylvania

Two Addresses on the General Theme:

"CHRIST - THE GIFT TO GIVE"

Presentation No. 2

In this second presentation we deal with the second question. In this case it was a question that was put by Pontius Pilate. It is the question regarding Jesus Christ - - WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS WHO IS CALLED CHRIST? (Matthew 27.22)

Pilate is every man. Every man is Pilate. Soon or late we must deal with the question - - What to do with Jesus?

Pilate had the right question, alright. But he never came up with the right answer. Pilate was fascinated by Christ....his wife was troubled by him. But being fascinated - - being troubled - - is never enough.

There are, as you know, three possible answers. Each of the answers is being given today.

The first answer: Reject Christ. Historically He was crucified - -

(here include the illustration of Paul Hoh's poster -- man with the wheelbarrow and the emaciated form on which was scrawled the words: JESUS CHRISTUS)

(include the second illustration of the Anti-God Museum in Moscow, where there is on display a chalice, a Bible, a crucifix -- remnants of what's been rejected.

Second possible answer: Ignore Christ - or treat Him with indifference Here perhaps are found the majority of people. Quote the poem, "When Jesus Came To Golgotha." Use the illustration of the thief who turns the picture of Jesus' face against the wall.

Third possible andwer: To respond with faith, to adore, to obey, to follow Christ as Lord and Saviour. Here use the hymn, "O God, I love thee . . "

Now how do we share this Christ? He is, of course then, a gift to give. And no gift, properly understood, can be dealt with selfishly. The real gift is always something that goes on giving.

But here we must pause to recognize that we can't give what we don't have. There is something to be said for the man who talks about being "born again." It indicates in no uncertain measure that the individual is aware of being Christ-possessed. Should you be too sophisticated to think in these terms -- then let the question be put to you: if you're not a born-again Christian, what kind of Christian are you?

John Wesley did more for England in his day than any other person, at least that's the way one historian put it. He got up before day-break, riding an old white horse (or was it gray?) so he could greet the miners as they went down into the pit.....then driving on to the next town, meeting and talking with the people in the market-place, repeating this kind of thing until night settled in. He kept a journal. Again and ever so often he put at the bottom of the page - - "I gave them Christ."

But Wesley was not always a Christ-possessed man. As a student of church history you know what happened. There was his experience in Georgia....there was the return to Britain and his experience at sea when he was impressed by the demeanor of the Moravians....there was that precious time when, at a quarter to nine in Aldersgate Street Mission, as someone was dealing with Luther's "Preface to the Romans" that he "felt his heart strangely warmed".... and he was never again the same. It was after that that he was able to share what he truly knew he had.

There was the experience of Robertson W. Dale of Kerr's Lane Church in

Birmingham. Now let me suggest the ways by which we share this precious gift. First, through prayer. And you may not have thought of it in that way. Prayer is always the best thing that we can do, and sometimes it is the only thing that we can do. We need to remember that it's through prayer that we receive the Holy Spirit, and it is through prayer that we share the Holy Spirit with others. It was Jesus, as recorded in Chapter 11 of Luke, who talks about the Heavenly Father's desire to give the Holy Spirit.

Cite Norman Peale's.....prayer group of predecessor....the role of Prayer Partners in Saint Luke Church.....the role of Kathe Stiehler.....of Esther Maria Katerina Benson.....of D. L. Moody's extraordinary preaching campaign and the invalided sister and the one who cared for her who prayed that the Spirit of God would be at work in the people who were attending the meetings... ....through what we profess with our lips.

There comes a time when we really have to speak the word. What do we know about Christ except what we have been taught?

It is always easier to talk about the church and its program than it is to talk about Jesus Christ himself. Close with the illustration of Martin Neomuller (?) and his dream about Hitler in the time of Judgment.

* * *

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost July 3, 1977

"TO WHAT END THIS BLESSING?"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Psalm 67:1-2

I am numbered among those who had the good fortune to have one pastor throughout the formative years of their life. He baptized me, he confirmed me in the Christian faith, he encouraged me to become a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And when the time came that I was ordained a minister, he stood by my side and joined those who placed holy hands in blessing upon my head. When the time came for me to be installed as a pastor in the first parish that I was privileged to serve, he was there. I am grateful that God allowed this to happen in my life, that his longshamed shadow could be cast upon me to this very day.

But I have an admission to make. While I heard him preach a number of times, of course I did, I don't remember any one sermon in particular. I remember the man -- of course I do -- but of all the sermons that I heard him preach, there is only one that I remember to this day. It was preached a half-century ago.....it was preached the week that Charles Lindburgh successfully crossed the Atlantic Ocean. And he made some reference to the fact that un-doubtedly there were people who talked about Lindburgh and in the same breath they'd say, "What courage!" - - or they would have said, "What luck he must have had!" - - or they might have said, "It was done once. Maybe it will never be done again" - - - or there may have been people who spoke with appreciation for the craft that he flew, frail as it now seems to us as we see it. But it was my pastor, who in the preaching of that sermon raised the question: "I wonder," said he, "if when Charles Lindburgh landed in France, if he bowed his head and said

'Thank God!'" I remember it! It left a mark upon the fabric of my mind.

People spoke about his luck....people spoke about his courage. It remained for my pastor as one person to say, "I wonder if the name of God was mentioned at all."

It's in that spirit that I come to this sacred desk today, on this, the Sunday before a national holiday. Now if there are those of you in this congregation this morning who are citizens of other countries, please do not misunderstand me. I will speak in this sermon of the way God has smiled upon America. But that is not to be understood that we are God's favorite nation. I trust I may be able to establish very clearly in your mind that we have been favored by God, but not at the expense of any other people.

Some of us have been privileged to travel in other parts of the world. We know how fair the land can be in other sections of the world - - we know what paradise the people who live there seem to think it is. And for some of us, if we had the time and the money, we would return to those places and thoroughly enjoy being there, for a while. But no matter where we may travel, those of us who call America ours are always eager to come back.

Tomorrow is a national holiday. And as we think of ourselves as a nation, undoubtedly there will be many people in America who will talk about our might and our power, who will talk about the fact that we like to believe that we are the strongest nation on the face of the earth, and we'll chide our people who sit in high places if they should become negligent in guaranteeing us that privileged spot. We expect them to keep us Number One. And who, when he thinks of America, doesn't know a measure of pride when he realizes how from ocean to ocean we have so much - - our natural resources, the beauty of our land. Well, you take it from there. We are the recipients of favor. That is not to say that we are God's favorite people.

The text for today's sermon is verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 67:

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us,
and cause his face to shine upon us:
That thy way may be known upon earth,
thy saving health among all nations."

Now think about that text. As a Bible student you ought to ask yourself, what was the historical situation? There's always a great deal to be said for that. Again and again we ought to see things in a historical perspective. While I'm not so sure just what the precise historical situation was -- scholars do not agree -- I can give you the benefit of two different schools of thought.

The one school of thought maintains that the attacking army had begun to retreat from Jerusalem, and the Israelites knew a measure of pride in their own military strength. And now that Jerusalem was theirs, they began to think of their good fortune. And undoubtedly there were those who said, "We've been pretty strong, pretty crafty - - we've been pretty clever! We've sent the enemy away. We have done it!"

The other school of thought maintains that the historical situation was a year when they had a bumper crop. The fields had yielded an increase the like of which they had not known in decades. And there were those who were grateful and said, "Our hard toil has paid off! We tilled the fields, we cultivated the crops - - we worked from sunrise to sunset, and beyond that. Look what we've been able to do!"

Now you pay your money, you take your choice. It could be either one of those schools of thought. And in all likelihood they walked away and they said, as they threw out their chests: "We've done it! We've pulled it off! - - by our might, and by our power."

But there was one man -- the psalmist, if you please -- who stood up and put his finger to his lips and reverently whispered the name of "GOD" - - and he brought God into the picture, and he said, 'We couldn't have done it on our own! The smile from heaven was upon us."

With all the strength that I can command I come to you in this manner and this mood today, as one person who might stand up, when we're prone to talk about our strength and our power, to whisper the name of "GOD" - - and in addition to all of that, to be able to say, "God be merciful to us - - God bless us - - cause your face to shine upon us!"

There's nothing wrong with praying the prayer, "God bless America." I wouldn't think much of you if you didn't ask God to bless us. I wouldn't think much of you if you didn't ask God to help us. But I wouldn't stop there if I were you. I'd go on, as the psalmist did, to recognize that when God blesses us He blesses us for a purpose: God gives in order that we might share. God blesses us that we in turn might be a blessing to others. I don't know how you read the mind of God, but I've lived long enough to be able to read it in this manner, that God exercises, as well He should, a measure of economy, while He deals with us extravagantly - - He also likes a good return on what He gives us. He likes to protect His investment, and He likes something to come from it. And when He bestows upon us a blessing He expects us then to exercise the capability of <u>good judgment</u> by which He endowed us with intelligence, so that we might be good stewards.

I have never made bold to ask the two sons that Winifred and I have been privileged to have, as to what they think of me as a father. It's a risk that I'm not so sure that I'd want to take! But I know one thing in particular that I've done with them in their impressionable years. Whether right or wrong, when they would come and ask a favor of me, like, "Can we have the car tonight?" ....as I look back and remember, invariably I'd say, "Well where are you going to go and when will you get back?" - - - I exercised a measure of economy -- I knew how much that car cost -- I knew how valuable that car was to me in my

ministry. I wasn't about to let it loose without expecting in return some measure of good judgment on their part, and reasonable care.

I've always placed a high value upon a dollar. And when on occasion they would come and ask for money - - and you may fault me for this! - - as I would give it to them I would find myself asking the question: "What are you going to do with it?" I place such a high value upon money that I wasn't about to allow it to be spent foolishly.

I'm making bold to suggest that maybe that's the way it is with God. God blesses us, and God has blessed us as a nation. And God sits there in judgment upon us - - - "What are you doing with what I've given you? - - How are you spending it? - - How are you taking care of it?" And that's why some of us rejoice that in these latter days we've become much more conscious of our natural resources, we've become much more sensitive to the need to protect our environment. The good earth, the God-given earth, is not to be desecrated. We need to deal with it in a hallowed way.

Well, here we are, on the day before our national holiday. I'd like to remind you that those who drafted the Declaration of Independence were God-fearing men, some of them were. And they made it their business to stand up and to raise the name of God - - - so much so to cast a lengthened shadow upon us in this day, and to say, "Remember, you're going to be held responsible by God, by a new nation that's going to be born, a whole new world that's being opened up."

I want to tell you this....I may have told it to you before. I'm profoundly grateful for my heritage. I can say that to you for two reasons. One, it was my heritage that introduced me to the Christian faith. My parents taught me to respect Jesus Christ and to love Him. I'm grateful for that.

I'm also grateful for the fact that when my father saw fit to come from the old world, that he wasn't content to stop somewhere in Europe. With the high re-

gard that I have for Europe -- now let me finish my sentence -- because had he stopped somewhere on what is now the other side of the Iron Curtain, I know what human rights would be denied me if I were his son and were living today, there. So I thank God for two things -- for my baptism in the Christian faith, and for the heritage which has been given to me in what we call a 'free world' ....and some of us have traveled where freedom has been taken away.

Winifred and I, after World War II, had people live in our home -- it was like a grand hotel -- those three exceedingly precious families that came from the Baltic region, where Alexander Nukilenko went out the back door as they came in the front door, heading for only one thing with all the breath and strength that he had -- for a free world. That's what we have, my friends.....

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us - - "

....we haven't always appreciated it. We've allowed corruption to exist, we've allowed our cities to destroy themselves. We haven't always dealt fairly with the good earth, and we haven't always given our children the benefit of a good example....

"God be merciful unto us".....but go on and bless us, and if you will, that we might be a blessing to others.....now you think about that.

I'll read it for you now. I've read it for you before. Rudyard Kipling preached a powerful sermon at the time of the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. They knew a measure of pride that the sun never set on British soil. And so they came with this great display of power. It was Sir Rudyard Kipling as one man to stand up and say:

"God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine;
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet, Lest we forget!

The tumult and the shouting dies;
The captains and the kings depart:
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet, Lest we forget!

Far-called, our navies melt away;
On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the nations, spare us yet, Lest we forget!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Sixth Sunday After Pentecost July 10, 1977

"ON GOD'S TERMS"

Luke 9:62

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from his Son, Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The sermon this morning is based upon the Gospel lesson for the Day. It bears the title: "On God's Terms," and the text, it's the 62nd verse of the 9th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

We talk a great deal about the Kingdom of God. It's our heart's desire. And you and I take a measure of pride in believing that we are inside the Kingdom of God. And you and I when we pray ask that God's will should be done on earth as it's done in Heaven. And sometimes we also pray that "Hasten the day, O God, when this kingdom on earth will be as Your Kingdom in Heaven."

But have you ever asked yourself the question: Why does it take the Kingdom so long to come? Why aren't things better here on earth than what they are? After all, you and I have signed up for the Kingdom - - after all, you and I are being numbered in the ranks of the redeemed - - after all, you and I want it to be that way. But why does it happen to be the way it is? Earth is far from being a reflection of Heaven. You know that, not only by what you experience on the outside but also by what you feel down deep at times within your own heart.

I have come to the sacred desk this morning to ask you to think with me for a little while upon one of the reasons why I honestly believe the Kingdom seems so long in coming. Very bluntly: we try to write it on our terms, and God says, "It has to be on mine!" .....you won't forget that, will you - - we try to sign up, but we want to write the contract. And God says, "You can't do it that way - - it has to be on my terms, and I write the contract." Somewhere

along the line you and I mistakenly allow ourselves to believe that we can run things pretty much according to our own liking.....and God is always shaking His head and saying, "No - - you can't."

Now let's get back to this Gospel Lesson for today. It's really quite a page in Scripture. I wish you would have paid more attention to it while it was being read! I can say that to you now, because as I recall to you what was read, it may be making a dent upon your mind for the first time.

Jesus had just announced that He was going to go to Jerusalem, and the implication is that when He gets to Jerusalem all hell is going to be let loose. He knew exactly what was going to happen to Him: they would kill Him, He'd be crucified. They'd strike a death blow - - no question about it! And He knew it. And He said, "The course has been determined. I'm going to go. There's no detour for me - - I'm heading that way."

And then a surprising thing happened. Not long afterward three people showed up, I'm willing to believe that they showed up in turn. Some people when they read this Gospel record think that Luke was just giving us an account of how on different times different people loomed on the horizon and offered themselves as recruits. But I'd like to think it was one of those bonanza days, when one right after another stepped forward and said, "I am a candidate - - count on me!" Well, that's in the Gospel lesson for today. The first man says, "Lord, I'm going to follow you no matter where you go!"

Presumably that would have pleased the heart of Jesus because Jesus had just said earlier that He was determined to go to Jerusalem, and had indicated the kind of thing that would happen there. And so this chap says, "You can count on me . . " -- enthusiastically -- "all the way!" And what did Jesus do? He discouraged him! He said, "I want to tell you something, fellow - - foxes have holes, birds have nests. The one you're talking to right now, I don't even have a place that I can call my own to lay my head. If you're signing up, I want you

to know that this is what lies ahead, and if you follow me, you follow me on my terms. I'll be the one who decides where I go. You won't, even though enthusiastically you say that you will." Jesus Christ knows human nature.

Then the other fellow came, and he said, "I'm interested . . . " You can read between the lines -- go ahead, read between the lines. He was impressed by Jesus. Jesus was always that dynamic personality. He could win friends, he could influence people. He always stood out. You know that, of course you do. And this fellow was absolutely charmed by the personality of Jesus. He said, "I'd like to sign up, too, but -- I can't report for duty tomorrow morning. I may have to report a little bit later. You see, I want to fulfill an obligation to my father. Let me bury him before I come around to following you."

Well now let me tell you something -- you know that I stem from mid-Eastern stock, and I know something about mid-Eastern culture. It's a very beautiful and a very wonderful thing. The family is a very closely-knit thing in the Middle East, and it was always the responsibility of the eldest son to bury his father. He's the one who made the arrangements, he's the one who stood closely by and saw his father through to the very end. And the old man wanted the satisfaction of knowing that when his end would come, his son would be there. It was a paternal obligation that rests upon every eldest son, according to Middle-East culture. And so quite honestly and quite frankly he said to Jesus, "It's this obligation to my family that I have to fulfill -- - first."

Now please understand, Jesus Christ was never insensitive to what we owe our parents. But when Jesus Christ responded the way He did to this man, He was simply giving him to understand that he wasn't the one who wrote the terms of the contract. Jesus Christ says, "If you're going to follow me, I write the terms of the contract -- you don't."

Then there was the third fellow who came up, in much the same spirit -- he wanted to sign up....he wanted to be a disciple....he wanted to go with Jesus.

And he said, "But first, if you don't mind, there are some things that I have to attend to, some matters that require my attention. When it's a bit more convenient for me, I'll respond for duty."

...and again Jesus Christ cuts him low, and discourages him, and says, "You can't do it that way - - you don't write the terms! God writes the terms of the contract when you sign up."

I'm always impressed when I read the Bible, how occasionally some figure of speech is drawn from the world of the military. And I'm also impressed by the fact that we refer to Jesus Christ as Lord and Master. And I'm impressed by the fact that we're introduced in our relationship to Him as His obedient followers, as His servants, as His disciples....which simply reminds us that we are in duty bound, then, to follow Him on His terms. Now do you wonder why the Kingdom of God moves at such a slow pace? - - - because again and again and again you and I, wittingly or unwittingly, are always trying to write the terms of the contract, according to our convenience, according to our pleasure. Now honestly, isn't that the way it is? -- any number of things we do for Jesus Christ only when it's convenient for us -- any number of things we do for Jesus Christ only when it's the easier thing to do, when the time is right for us.

I'm sorry to tell you this, but as I survey the contemporary scene, the one word that seems to be lost in the vocabulary of Christian people as much as any word is the word sacrifice. We are a convenience generation - - we want everything to be done conveniently. I can remember when a home was being advertised, it was being put on the market, and there was a great measure of satisfaction, the person who owned the home or was renting it would say: All Conveniences. Well who doesn't want them? But I have to tell you that God says, "The world doesn't operate according to your convenience. The

world operates according to the standards that I've written into the contract." And you and I get into all kinds of problems, into all kinds of difficulty, when we forget that.

I never cease to be thrilled when I deal with the Ten Commandments. For to all intents and purposes, what in the world is God doing in the Ten Commandments except saying, "These are the terms that I am laying down for you.....it's meant to be a good world, and I want you to enjoy being with one another. I want you to establish a good social relationship on this earth. And so that you may have it, since it's my world which I've created for your benefit, I'm going to lay down the terms so that always you will be able to benefit by it. And don't you foul me up, and don't you try to change those terms!"

But we do. We tamper with the Ten Commandments. We try to make them mean less than what God means by them.

Here in Saint Luke Church I drew a measure of pride — justifiably so, I hope — in the way we've adapted the ritual of Confirmation. Think of it now....here is the young recruit for the Kingdom, an impressionable teenager, and we've modified the service so that when he comes to the altar a question is put to him directly:

> "Do you love the Lord Jesus and do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?"

....and then the answer has to be given — only one acceptable answer:

> "Yes, with my whole heart!"

You ought to know that there are some people who fault me for this, and they tell me, "You have no right to exact such a promise from a youngster." Well, I pay some respect to what they tell me, so I have personal conferences with them at Bethany, before their Confirmation, and try to give them to understand as best I can what that answer means: You're not holding anything back - - you're going to follow Jesus Christ earnestly and faithfully as long

as you live. And then I have to say, "It can't be otherwise, because that's the basis upon which Jesus Christ accepts you. He writes the terms of the contract. I don't. Nor do you!"

And then as best I can I give them to understand sometimes that some people think being a Christian is a one-day-a-week affair. You sign up for a Sunday service only. What would happen in the military if a person signed up for just one day only a week? And what would happen if in the military a person signed up -- "I'll perform my duty only as it's convenient for me and for my family." What kind of a world would we have?

Let me go back to where I began. Ask yourself the question every now and then why the Kingdom seems so slow in coming? Don't blame God. You know who to blame. We're always trying to re-write the contract, always trying to reduce it to our convenience. And God is forever shaking His head: "No! It won't work that way!"

And then Jesus ended by saying, if a man puts his hand to the plow and begins to look in My direction, and then keeps looking back -- well he just won't be fit.

....and that, too, is part of our problem. As far as the Kingdom is concerned, it requires the forward, steady look. Now you think about that!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Seventh Sunday After Pentecost July 17, 1977

"THE THREAT AND THE PROMISE REMAIN"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Galatians 6:7

The sermon bears the title: "The Threat And The Promise Remain" and the text, is the 7th verse of the 6th chapter of a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to a group of Christians who lived in Galatia:

> "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

I have a notion that much of the material that appears in some of the letters that Paul wrote were first preached in sermons that he delivered, to this congregation and to that congregation. You know, of course, that he was an itinerant preacher, and he went around establishing congregations. And like as not he was scheduled to be the preacher for the day. And when he would return to them he was always given the privileged position as the preacher.

And after he had done all this, and keeping in close relationship with the congregations, he'd write them the letters. And I have a notion now, that much of the material that appears in his letters he first preached. And I suggest to you that I would like to have heard him as the preacher. I have a high regard for him as a letter-writer. But it's one thing to read what's been said...it's another thing to hear it first-hand. For there are those subtleties and those nuances, you know, the turn of the head, a glint of the eye, the gesture of the hand, the emphasis of the voice. And I'm inclined to think that when he came to that part that serves as the text for today's sermon, that there might have been something like thunder in his voice, and if he was given to pounding the pulpit, his fist might have come down heavily at this point.....

"Be not deceived - - " "....you can't thumb your nose at God!

(a free translation) " . . you can't ignore Him! His law

remains...a man is going to reap what he sows!"

Any preacher worth his salt is in duty bound to preach what needs to be preached. Not what people may prefer, and not what they desire. But any preacher who is true to his vocation is in duty bound to declare the Word of God. And he must see himself as God's spokesman. And in all likelihood the itinerant tentmender who had become a preacher discovered that Christians were taking a great deal of liberty in their relationship with God.

Now that deserves a bit of explanation. Christians are not the only religious people, you know that. And Christians are not the only people who believe in God, you know that, too. But Christians are people who, when they think of God, use an exceedingly precious term - - they call Him "Heavenly Father" - - as well they should. But what happens occasionally is this: that Christians, who are human, when they think of God in such a manner, may enjoy the unwarranted luxury of thinking they have an advantage that other people don't have. And there is always the temptation to exploit that relationship.

When you call God "Heavenly Father" you may be inclined to think that you're His only child - - and you know very well that we're not His only children. He is the Father of the entire family of the human race. And Gustave Alain, the distinguished Swedish theologian, said it very properly when he maintained that "We are all in the hand of God, whether with our belief or with our unbelief." We are all His children. Some of us on occasion may be obedient, and some of us may be disobedient. But be that as it may, obedient or disobedient, we're still His children, and He still wants to be known as our Father.

But human as we are, we Christians sometimes think that God will treat us in a way that He won't treat other people, and that kind of thing can raise an ugly head, honestly. We may have our moments, if not our days, when we think that maybe God will set aside His rules, set aside His regulations that we don't keep. And when we break them, that just because He's our Heavenly Father, He'll

make allowances for us. Well it could be that Preacher Paul, moving around from congregation to congregation, discovered the damage that was being done where people allowed themselves to think like that. And that's why I'm inclined to think, whether you see it that way or not, that there may have been thunder in his voice when he said: "Don't be deceived - - God is not mocked! As a man sows, that's what he's going to gather." - - - the law of the harvest in the natural world prevails in the laws of the spiritual world!"

Now God always wants to get this across to us: God wants us to know that He's a God of love, He's a God of justice, He's a God of all people. Now in order to do that God makes His will known to us, I think, in two different ways. Now listen very carefully.

He makes His way known to us by His words. That's why we call the Bible the Word of God - - it's God's message to us. That's why we refer to Jesus Christ as the Living Word - - it was God-come-to-us-in-the-flesh, to communicate to us, to make known to us His will and His truth.

I like to think of it this way, that the Bible is God's-Manual-For-Operation. Just like a manufacturer designs, fabricates, manufactures an appliance or utensil, he provides a user's manual so that they will get the maximum benefit, according to the mind of the person who made it, that it will run best only as you abide by these rules and regulations of the manufacturer.....so God gives us His User's Manual. And I like to think of the Bible as God's Book of Instructions for us as to how to best live and how to order our days here in our social relationships in this world. And if we keep the rules according to the manufacturer, things will go well. But it's when we ignore them that we run into difficulty. So God makes His way and His will known to us by Words.

Now I'm going to confess something to you and you need to hear it. I try not to forget that holy hands were placed in blessing upon my head, when at a time I was set aside as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. And while all of us are called to be God's messengers and his ministers in baptism, some of us

are set aside to proclaim His Word and His truth in this manner. And I confess to you that even though I have been coming to this sacred desk for over two decades now, each time I come back to it I come with fear and trembling lest I fail my Lord in proclaiming the truth. And that's why you must go on praying for me, that I may be a faithful minister of the Word. Because -- now let me put down the full weight at this point -- human as we are, we have a way of turning off what God wants us to hear. Our minds may be preoccupied, we may be thinking more of somebody else's sins than our own sins. And so we can make a mockery of God by not applying His word to us, but to somebody else...we may make a mockery of God by allowing ourselves to become insensitive to what He wants us to hear. The voice of God has been echoing down the corridor of time, and some people never have really heard it.

That's the second thing I want to tell you: God is determined to get His message across. God is determined that some way, somehow, we understand that this world is meant to operate on His principles, that at the heart of the universe there is a moral order that cannot be violated or ignored. And so -- and so if we don't hear the words, then God confronts us with <u>events.</u> And that's why some of us place a high value upon history, for what is history except the chronicle of events that take place -- what is history. What is history but the way by which God proves to us that His point is correct? If we don't understand it any other way, God puts it in front of us by the deeds that are done, the records that are written, the results of the lives that we live. It's as simple as all that.

We need to appreciate all over again the historical perspective, because, I can tell you this, when even secular historians have admitted that every great nation that has ever existed on the face of the earth that's been disappointed has not been disappointed primarily because of the weight and the power of the

enemy from the outside. But they fell because of moral deterioration, they were corrupt from within.

And that frightens me. I love America, and I'd like to see her remain great. And I'd like to believe that right now we have a kind of a breathing spell in which we're placing a high value all over again on the old-fashioned virtues. It's a very healthy thing, honestly. And yet I know what appears on certain television screens....I know the kind of things that are being portrayed in books that are being published.....I know the kind of philosophies that are being echoed from one corner of the earth to the other, that sin is only a matter of opinion, that we've lived long enough now that we can be so sophisticated that we can get rid of some of our inhibitions, that any man ought to be able to do his own thing. And down the corridors of time comes the eternal voice of God: "You can't get away with it. If you don't believe me, then Life itself will teach you. For eventually every man has to sit down to his own banquet of consequences." . . . .

> " . . . be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

Now don't get me wrong. We Christian ministers proclaim the gospel of God's love. And whenever I come to this sacred desk that's the message of messages that you need to hear, that God loves us and that God forgives us. Which He most certainly does! But that doesn't mean that God can take away the scars. They remain.

Frank Boreham was an Australian Methodist preacher who had a marvelous imagination. In one of his books he talks about the Prodigal Son, and he gives us the other side of the coin. You and I, when we think of the Prodigal Son, think of the way he came back, and how the waiting father forgave him. That's the wonderful part of the story, you know, the hero in the story is the waiting father -- and how the father forgave him.

But when you and I emphasize that we forget some things. We forget what the prodigal son looked like when he came back home — the blush of youth was no longer there, there was a man who showed the marks of dissipation and riotous living who came back — not very attractive. And in addition to all that, there were those people in the far country where he had wasted his years in riotous living.....

> ...the illegitimate children he had sired, and the women who hated him because of the way he exploited a relationship....of the kids undoubtedly that he had taught to steal and to cheat....the irreparable damage that was done, and even God could not take that away.....

God forgives. But the scars remain.

But I told you the title for this sermon is "The Threat and the Promise Remain" - - - the same preacher who reminded us of a threat also declares the promise: that for those who live by the spirit, for those who sow deeds of kindness and love and mercy, for those who are constantly opening the door of their life for Jesus Christ to come in and enter.....for those in this present moment who are allowing the eternal principles to prevail - - - they, too, will be rewarded, not by a threat, but by a promise. The basic rule remains.

Now human as we are, we make the decision. You may live within the shadow of a threat: you may have a spring in your step today, with the assurance that the promise of God's favor will be yours.

It can be as terrible as that.....

....or it can be as wonderful as this.

This I most certainly believe.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Eighth Sunday After Pentecost July 24, 1977

"GOD'S KIND OF PERSON"

O GOD, We make so little time to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to Your Word. That we may make the most of it, lay hold of us now by Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Luke 10:37

The text for this sermon, which is based upon the Gospel for the Day, is the last verse of that Gospel, and the words of Jesus Christ to a man who asked the question -- His words, as He concluded His conversation with that person:

"Now you go, you do likewise."

...a free translation, of course, would be: "Now this is the kind of person that you ought to become. As you travel along the highway of life, no matter what other people may be like, this is what you ought to be."

It pays to ask questions, you know, of course it does. We learn a great deal by the questions that we ask, and especially if we ask the right kind of questions. Which leads me to say to you quite parenthetically that some of us ride rather uneasily with other people in their automobile, if they're behind the wheel. We get lost perhaps along the highway....we become uneasy. If only the driver would stop and ask somebody as to where we are and as to how we can get where we'd like to be. It pays to ask questions, and particularly when you ask the right question and you get the right answer from the right person.

And that's the way this wonderful story occurred. You and I would not have it today if someone hadn't asked a very important question. A man stood and asked Jesus Christ a question about eternal life...and as He was wont to do, He answered by telling them a story, one of the best-known stories that Jesus ever told. And as you and I remember the parable that He spoke, it's listed among our favorites. It's known by a variety of names. The best name, of course, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Now for our purpose this morning allow me to bring to your attention the fact that life itself is a journey, and you and I are meant to travel the highway which is called Life. As we travel the highway of life we can become one of four different kinds of people. Now you want to keep that in mind, you can categorize the travelers into four different areas.

As an example: there are those who become victimized. As they travel along the highway of life they're those who lay hold upon them, assault them, they become a statistic. Jesus told the story about a man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho and that's what happened to him. That's category Number One.

If I were wont to do this sort of thing, to turn our gathering together now into a very informal situation, and if I walked the sacred aisle of this place and I stopped here and there and I would say to some of you, "Tell me, out of your experience, how many people do you know who have been mugged?...who have been raped?....who have been attacked?...." And in all likelihood any number of you would stand up immediately and tell us about someone in your family, someone on your street, someone in the apartment house where you happen to live. It happens every day. And they are the victimized, they're exploited, they're hurt, they're left wounded, half-dead. That's category Number One.

Category Number Two, of course: those who cause such things to happen. They are the thieves, the exploiters. They take advantage of other people. They are diabolically possessed. And it's very right and proper for a Christian to be made sensitive to the fact that there are people who are Evil personified. The Devil is on the loose, and he lives in people. We're reluctant to say it because we know it to be God's world, and God has never let up His hold upon it, but when we think of some people that we know we're constrained to call it a wicked world because it is made up of any number of wicked people who live by the damnable philosophy that whatever anybody else has can be his, and he's out

to get it, no matter how much of a price he has to pay. I am sorry to have to tell you this, but there are people like that.

And I should pause at this moment in the preaching of this sermon and tell you that if I didn't place a high value upon the Scriptures as a Christian, because it leads me to Jesus Christ, I'd place a high value on the Scriptures because it offers a realistic reading of life. It tells us exactly how life is. And that's what's happening now when Jesus tells this story. He is telling it as it is. There are the victimized, and there are those who cause them to fall, to bleed, to die.

There's a third category. They also travel the highway of life, and when they come to the place where such a thing has happened, as the Scriptures put it, they pass by on the other side. They keep themselves at a safe distance, they do not become involved. And in all likelihood their reaction would be, "Thank God it didn't happen to me! -- and thank God it's not someone that I know." Oh, they may have their reasons for not becoming involved....."How do I know but what that person isn't a decoy? -- made up that way, or battered to that extent to lure me on so that I become a greater prey...."

Or perchance they may make it a matter of arithmetic: "I'm bent on a mission myself of great importance, I've an engagement to keep, a very important one. And who knows but what if I were to become late, hundreds of people would be denied what I could bring to that meeting. I can't stop now, as a matter of arithmetic, and pay attention to one person....." Well, you take it from there. That's not the purpose of this sermon, to explain why this third category exists. I only know that it does. And this, too, is a true reading of life.

But wouldn't it be a terrible thing if this sermon were to stop at this point and I'd say this is the way life is: you can be victimized.....or you can be numbered among those who cause other people to bleed.....or you can be numbered among those who pass them by on the other side.

But you're not forgetting, are you, that the teller of this story is Jesus Christ? And Jesus Christ always sees it from the God-perspective. And so Jesus Christ introduces a fourth category: the man who came to the beaten one and bound up his wounds, and put him on his own beast of burden and took him to the inn, the one nearest at hand....reached into his own pocket and said, "Now I can't stay any longer, but please see that he gets all the attention he ought to have, and what's more, if this isn't enough, you see that he gets the attention that he needs -- all the way through -- and when I come this way again I'll settle the bill, pay you whatever else remains."

It's a grand and glorious thing, isn't it, to have Jesus Christ introduce the fourth category. Remember now, this is a realistic reading of life. And I'm happy to tell you that life can be this way, too. Jesus Christ is saying, "Now this is the kind of person you're meant to be - - you go, and you do the kind of thing that the Samaritan did."

But we don't always get the point of the story. I smile as broadly as you do when I remember the Sunday School teacher who was teaching quite effectively this parable of the Good Samaritan, and as her custom was, when she finished she said, "Now boys and girls, what does this story tell us? - - the lesson to be learned?" And one youngster immediately volunteered and said, "Why, when we're in trouble, people ought to come and help us." And that's exactly the way some people read it!

But Jesus Christ didn't tell it for that purpose. The question of questions isn't: Who is my neighbor? According to this parable, the question is: To whom can I be a neighbor? And that can be an entirely different thing. Life is a journey, and God has put us here to be neighbor to any man who may be in need.

That's the glorious thing about life, because soon or late, perhaps later than we wish, God's kind of traveler looms upon the horizon. Life is meant to be that way, and you and I are meant to be that kind of person. That's the won-

derful thing that I can tell you, that God does put down along the highway of life the kind of person who reflects His kind of love.

Now I don't know how you read Jesus Christ. You can read Him in many different ways. For our purpose this morning let me suggest to you that He is God's traveler-on-the-way, God-come-to-us-in-person, to identify with us as life is, and then to meet our need. There is no greater need than our redemption from our sinful nature. And God, the Constant Companion, the Perpetual Pilgrim, meets us, stoops to our level.....and sees that our every need is met, whatever the price is that has to be paid.

Don't you dare forget for a single minute the risk that the Samaritan took when he allowed himself to become involved....and the risk that he took even at the end when he says to the inn-keeper, who could have exploited his good nature, and said, "Now take care of him, and whatever else is needed, see that he gets it." Jesus Christ is God-on-the-Road, come to meet our need. And there is no deeper need than the redemption from sin.

I can't possibly conclude this sermon without telling you anew, perhaps, if I've told it to you before, about the young man, cynical in nature, who became a novelist. He took a familiar theme, and this is what he did with it....

> ...the setting was in a small Pennsylvania village. The young man is restless, he can't stand it any longer, he wants to head for the big city. His mother says, "All right, son, if you want to go, you go, we can't keep you here. But let me tell you what could happen to you -- they'll take advantage of you, they'll beat you, they'll take away so much from you. But, son, when the worst is done, if you want to come back home, that's what we want you to do -- you come back home....and when you stand on yonder hill and

look down upon our house, you'll find a light in the window!"

....that's the way the story should have been written....but the cynic, now, the young novelist, writes it that way, but with one exception: it all happened just like the mother said, and the fellow comes back and when he stands on the hill and looks down at his house, there's no light in the window.....

The young novelist is eager to get some kind of evaluation and took it to a wise man who lived in the community who had been a writer himself, and he put his manuscript in front of the old man and he said, "Now read it for me, will you, and tell me what you think." The old man obliged and read it. And when he came to the conclusion -- no light in the window -- he jumped up from the chair, grabbed the cynical young novelist by the shoulder, and said, "You rascal, you - - you put that light back in the window!"

I think that's what Jesus Christ has done for us in the telling of this story. He's put the light back in the window. God-in-Christ is always keeping the light in the window that looks out on a wicked world. And because of that light some of us are willing to stay to journey's end.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Ninth Sunday After Pentecost July 31, 1977

"YOU HAVE IT - - OR YOU DON'T"

O GOD, We make so little time to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to Your Word. That we should make the most of it now, give us the help of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Psalm 37:5

You would have liked the paternal grandfather of our Associate Pastor. He came, as some of you know, as an immigrant from Beirut, Lebanon. Unlettered as he was, he was an astute observer of the human scene. And one of the things that I cherish as I recall my relationship with him is the way that he would say, "Well, a person either has it, or he doesn't." And how true that is. You either have it, or you don't.

John Wesley was ordained an Anglican priest. He felt constrained by God to come to America and to minister to the Indians that lived in Georgia. He looked upon that mission as a complete failure. He turned his back upon America and went back to Great Britain. As they were heading for the English shores there was a storm at sea.....he was greatly disturbed and became very anxious. But he discovered that he was in the company of a group of Moravians, who seemed to be absolutely untroubled, to be possessed with a measure of calm and quiet trust. They had it.....John Wesley did not.

He must have reflected upon it, undoubtedly, and then one night in May, at a quarter to nine, in the Aldersgate Street Chapel, back -- was it 1735? -- when someone not unusually gifted and skilled was talking about Luther's Preface to the Romans.....and from that time on John Wesley had it - - - his word for it: it was then that he felt his heart strangely warmed and he was never, never again the same.

Once there was a man, traveling a certain road, and something happened to

him, he was stricken by a blinding light. Up to that point he was known by the name of Saul. To indicate the line of demarcation that took place now in his life, he was called thereafter by the name of Paul. Before what happened on the Damascus Road, he didn't have it....after what took place on the Damascus Road, he had it.

To a certain degree I feel like someone coming to the sacred desk as a person who has just come back from a trip and he can't wait to tell people where he's been, and the people with whom he talked. In reality that is my experience this morning.

As some of you may know, I have had the good fortune this past week to serve as Chaplain for missionaries of the Lutheran Church in America who happen to be here from overseas on furlough or about to take on a new assignment. It is an annual convocation. It took place as usual on the campus of Carthage College on the shores of Lake Michigan, some 50 - 60 miles north of Chicago. As I sojourned with those people this past week, there is no question in my mind - - - they have it!

On Friday evening of this past week there was a testimonial meeting, recognizing certain missionaries who have, as far as retirement schedules are concerned, have completed their tour. They asked them to speak.

> ...there was Vivian Gullaam, who for forty years now has been out there in Tanzania -- a roly-poly sort of person, who said, "I decided that when I would go as a missionary, I'd go wherever my Lord would lead me and I would do whatever had to be done...." And then she gave us a recital of the variety of ministries -- menial, and otherwise sublime, she was called to do. As I listened to her there was no question in my mind -- she had it! She was aglow with the Spirit, complete and fervent trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to guide and to lead her life.....

...my colleague of other days was introduced, Dr. Wesley Sadler, who is the literacy expert of the Lutheran Church. He and his wife Roslyn have lived in 61 different places in these more than thirty years. I should tell you about his wife Roslyn - - she walked around on the campus, well beyond her 60th birthday, as a veritable cameo, a little bit of a gem. Her life plan, according to Roslyn, was to be a fashion designer, and she was all set to go to college. And then she fell in love with Wes.....she's kept alive her artistic temperament, no matter where she's gone. When there was furniture to be built, she built it....when Wes needed an illustrator for some of the work he was doing, it was Roslyn who did the illustrating. Somebody in the States who knew them, when they were in Liberia, said, "You ought to have a Jeep" - - so they gave them a Jeep...but there was no road to the place where they lived in Wozi..... ....so Roslyn built a road!.....

....there was Marion Halvorson, whose niece is a member of this parish, who went out to East Africa as a secretary. She attended a revival service at one time and she saw that the person alongside of her was not singing. After the meeting she discovered he wasn't singing because he could not read. Right on the spot she determined he ought to be able to read ....and her life was turned around and she, too, became interested in literacy, and she's left her mark in the name of Jesus Christ....

I could go on and name person after person, but what I want to tell you about them is this: as they recited some of the hardship and the struggle, the

pain and the anguish, there was always exuding this measure of quiet trust, this element of complete faith that what they were about was the Lord's work, and the Lord would provide and the Lord would sustain them, and the Lord would find a way, even as some of us said between services this morning - - if a door should be closed, the Lord would always open a window. There would always be a way.

And I was tremendously impressed by the fact that each one said, "If I had it to do over again, I most certainly would do it, and I wish that I could!" ...and that's what I have to tell you about Esther Beck, in passing. She's out there in Taiwan. They retired her eight years ago. Would you like to know what she's doing with her life savings? (as little as they may be for a missionary) - - - she's spending her life savings by getting a ticket, regularly, from Minnesota, and she goes back as a volunteer in Taiwan now, doing the same kind of work that she's done before, only without pay, at her own expense - - - aglow with the Spirit! They have it! I have never seen more contented people. I have never seen people more aglow with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The text for this meditation is Psalm 37, verse 5:

"Commit thy way unto the Lord and trust him."

Why am I preaching this sermon to you? You're not a candidate for Taiwan, are you? You're not a candidate for Hong Kong....for India....for Sumatra...for Kenya.....for Tanzania....for Nepal? You're not entertaining the thought at all, are you? Well you don't have to be. This sermon and the truth of this sermon is applicable to you where you are. For every Christian, wherever he is, is meant to be aglow with the Spirit.....every Christian, wherever he may be, is meant to be a fully integrated person, completely comfortable with himself. Every Christian, regardless of his situation, is meant to be the kind of person who says, "Well here I am, Lord - - You take over - - You guide me - - You show me."

If I wanted to expose you, which I won't do, of course, I could use some of you as Exhibit A, as people who are very tired with yourselves, who are bored with yourselves, who are not very happy with yourselves. And you happen to be where you are, in a world of affluence, in a world where the physical hardships are at a minimum. But you're bored, and tired. And there's no place where you can go to get away from yourself, and you have nobody on your hands but yourself. And it's a terrible experience.

Some of these missionaries have been in some places of isolation where they have had nobody on their hands but themselves, of course....but it's a wonderful thing to be able to learn to live with yourself, and you accomplish that as you recognize your relationship to God. And when you're squared off with God it's amazing how things begin to fall into their rightful pattern and life takes on an exciting dimension!

Last night as I was walking around the Saint Luke area I came upon one of our parishioners walking his dog and his neighbor's dog. And before I knew it we were in wonderful conversation. And calling him by name I said, "Are you still praising the Lord?" And he gave me his enthusiastic: "Yes, verily, I am!" He said, "Let me tell you something: the Lord just put it upon my heart not long ago to get in touch with a man who is in a Tennessee jail. I heard that he wanted somebody to write to, or somebody to write to him, so I decided I'd write him. I don't know how I heard it but I heard it, and so I wrote him. And then as I asked the Lord to lead me, the Lord put it into my heart to buy an airplane ticket to go down into that town in Tennessee and to visit him. And I have. And I've discovered needs that that man has. And by the grace of God, God is using me to meet that man's needs."

The man's excited - - he's allowing the Lord to use him. It's exceedingly wonderful. The man isn't bored.

I want to tell you about a dream that I had not so long ago. In that dream I talked with the Apostle Paul, and I said to the Apostle Paul, "Tell me, Paul,

you didn't always have it. When were the gears shifted so that you went into high gear?" And in that dream the Apostle Paul says, "I'll tell you. There was a time in my life when I decided that it wasn't that God was expecting me to do more for Him .....there was a time in my life when God gave me to understand that I should give Him a chance to do more for me! And then it was that I said, 'Take over' -- and that's what's happened."

I covet for every one of you, even as I covet for myself this brand new dimension which occurs when you let the Lord take over. You can afford to do it, my friend. He's been around far longer than you....and His wisdom surpasses our understanding....and His love is always greater.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO LEARN TO PRAY"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Luke 11:1

This sermon is based upon the Gospel for the day, the introductory verse of the 11th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

> "And it came to pass as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him and said, 'Lord, teach us to pray' . . . "

You will recognize at once, won't you, that before they made the request to be taught to pray, they were first impressed with the fact that Jesus was praying. And I suggest to you that this is something that we need to remember: before we become really interested in praying, it isn't that we're going to be taught to pray -- it's the fact that somehow we have been impressed by people who pray.

If you don't mind, permit me in this way to share with you out of my own life certain impressions that remain to me to this very day, and I hope as long as God gives me memory.....

> --one was, when I sat as a youngster in church in that small town in Pennsylvania. I couldn't quite appreciate the preaching -- not that he wasn't a good preacher, but I was too young, my mind would wander.....I'd count the rafters in the ceiling, and then my mind would go to the pipes of the organ, and I'd count them backward and forward. But always my mind returned to what was up there above the Communion rail. It was a life-size painting of Hofmann's interpretation of "Christ In The Garden of Gethsemane" -- my first real introduction, if you don't mind, in this way, to Jesus Christ, or to Jesus Christ

as the Man of Prayer.....

To the day I breathe my last I'll thank God that in the impressionable days of my youth I was not first introduced to Jesus Christ performing a miracle, or to Jesus Christ standing there on the mount and preaching a sermon, or even to Jesus Christ hanging upon a cross and dying. My debt is very great to those who decided that they would place there in full view of the congregation every time they came to worship -- Jesus Christ upon His knees.

Small wonder, then, that when the time would come that your Associate Pastor and I could walk together where Jesus walked, that one of the first places that I would want to lead him to was the Garden of Gethsemane, and that he might see for himself what they tell us to this day is the rock, or a rock very much like it, upon which Jesus knelt to pray.

I was impressed with what I saw there in church, even more so than what I heard through the lips of the preacher - - not that he wasn't a man of God, and not that he didn't preach the Gospel....but before I could appreciate all that, God got through to me by the picture of Jesus Christ on His knees. One becomes interested in praying, not because he's first taught to pray, but because he's impressed by those who pray.

The second vignette, if you don't mind: I suppose I was only about four years of age. My maternal grandmother had come to visit us. She spoke only Arabic, I never remember speaking a word with her in English. I don't remember anything about her except what I am about to tell you now....

> ...I went by the room in which she was sleeping...the door was ajar. It was in the morning, and with a child's curiosity I looked in the room, and what did I see? - - she was sitting up in her bed, she hadn't even put her foot outside the bed, to my knowledge, she hadn't gotten up yet, so it appeared....but she

> was fingering her rosary -- she was a devout Roman Catholic -- and before she would even so much as get out of bed she was saying her prayers.....

...unashamedly I tell you this, the impression was made, and even to this morning before I got out of bed there were certain prayers that were offered. One becomes interested in praying, not so much because he's first taught, but because the impression is made.

The third one: my father was an immigrant and a pedlar. With a suitcase gripped by one hand on one side and another on the other, balanced by a leather strap across his shoulder, he'd walk from town to town, selling handkerchiefs, linens, shoe laces. He'd be gone for several weeks at a time. My mother would gather us together, the six of us kids, as a mother hen gathers her chicks, and beneath the painting of Jesus Christ knocking at the door, which was a focal point for her, she bowed her head and she would pray. The impression remains to this very day. One becomes interested in praying not because he's first taught, but because he's impressed. And happy indeed is that child who is growing up in your home whose precious memory will remain with him, as God gives him memory, of how a father or a mother or a brother or a sister would say, "Let us pray."

One of the exceedingly precious things that I shared at Bethany, our retreat house, with some of our confirmands....

> ...we used to do that, you know, after they were confirmed in June or on Pentecost, we would gather them together in small groups in October, and then we'd talk to them . . .

...and I remember one youngster -- you wouldn't have thought that he would ever talk like this -- saying that one of the things that he remembered about his home life was how his older sister (there's about six years' difference

between them) would come in at night and tuck him into bed and say a prayer. When it comes to this whole matter of praying, which is the most wonderful thing in the world,, "More things are wrought by prayer than this old world dreams of."

Prayer is so important that the Apostle Paul could say: "Pray without ceasing." Prayer was so important that when the disciples came and they found Jesus praying they said to themselves, "This is it! This is the reason why he is the way he is, this is the secret!" And because they were impressed, they asked to be taught to pray.

I'm suggesting to you now with all the strength that I can command, that when you think of Jesus Christ, always think of Him as the Man of Prayer. Unfortunately for some people, when they first think of Jesus Christ, they think of Him as walking on the water....feeding five thousand people...causing a blind man to see - - they first think of Jesus Christ as the miracle-worker. And of course miracles He did! But don't first think of Him as a miracle-worker. He used to tell His disciples that that's one thing He didn't want to be remembered for, and even when He performed certain miracles He would say, "Don't tell people what you saw." He didn't want His reputation simply to be established because He had power in this way.

There are some people, when they think of Jesus Christ, they first think of Him as the preacher, who could hold five thousand people spellbound as He gave them unforgettable pictures of God, as He gave them a new sense of appreciation for themselves and who they were and what they were meant to do here on earth and how they were to live here on earth. They had never heard anyone preach the way He preached. Well, there are some people who when they first think of Jesus Christ, they think of Him as the one who went around preaching and teaching. And the Gospel record is correct when it says, "Jesus came preaching." But don't first think of Jesus Christ as the preacher, proclaim-

er of the truth that He was.

There are some people who when they think of Jesus Christ remembered Him as the man who was interested in them. He was so friendly. Even when He preached to five thousand people it seemed as though each one thought He was preaching only to him. And when He would be walking down a country lane, if He saw a person He took time to talk to that person. He was always on the lookout for people, finding them sometimes in the strangest of places. Even that man Zaccheaus -- up a tree -- and Jesus found him and paid attention to him. And some people remember Him, then, because of the way He treated people, the way He loved them, loved people that other people couldn't love! Think of Him in that way if you wish.

But then ask yourself the question, why could He love where others could not love? - - why could He preach and establish so clearly in men's minds and hearts the truth of God as others could not? - - why was He able to perform these miracles where others were impotent and powerless? Be impressed by all these things, but ask yourself the question: how was this possible? And the answer lies that Jesus Christ was above all else a man of prayer - - because He prayed He was able to do what He did. By getting in touch with God He was able to communicate the truth of God to people. By asking God to fill up the reservoir of His heart with love He was able to take that love and channel it into the lives of other people. What is prayer but communion with God? What is prayer but trying to see the world through God's eyes? What is prayer but allowing all the power of God to be made available in and through a person? What is prayer but relationship, identification with God? People become like the folks with whom they associate. Jesus Christ spent so much time in communion with the Heavenly Father that one day, when somebody came and asked that they might know what God is like, Jesus Christ could say with the utmost of assurance, "Well look at me, and this is what God is like."

There are some people who are impressed with the spiritual vitality of Saint Luke Church. You know the answer, don't you? A half-hour before the first service here in Saint Luke today, a handful of people gathered in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart and prayed that the Holy Spirit would have full reign in all that would occur here. You know, don't you, that there are those who every day see that every single home in this parish is remembered before the Throne of Grace? Are you weary, my friend? are you heavy-laden? are you distressed? Pray. Pray. It's the perfect answer.

My friend, Dr. Dwight F. Putman, one-time President of the Pennsylvania Synod, used to tell about meeting with a church council who weren't too happy with their preacher. And then he said to them: "Is it a better preacher that you really want?" And eagerly they said to the President of Synod, "Yes!" Then he surprised them by saying, "Pray more earnestly for the one that you already have."

It may not be as simple as all that, but it could be. And as I walk away from this sacred desk, for which I have so high regard, I want to tell you something that you may not know . . . that when Norman Vincent Peale became the Pastor of Marble Collegiate Church on Fifth Avenue, New York, he paid a beautiful tribute to his predecessor, Dr. David Burroughs, the first Sunday that Dr. Peale went to preach. He held up in his hand a pillow, on which were two well-worn spots, and he said, "Here is where your former Pastor got his sermons."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost August 14, 1977

"BEYOND SUCCESS"

AND ONCE MORE, O God, in this way we give some measure of undivided attention to your Holy Word. We'd like to make the most of the time that we spend in this way. To that end, give us the blessing now of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Luke 12:20

The sermon is based upon the Gospel for the Day, and any verse from that passage could serve as a text. But suppose we use these verses from that 12th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke that reads in this way as the basis for today's meditation:

> "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, 'Thou fool! This night thy soul shall be required of thee. Then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?'"

It is only a surmise, you'll remember that, won't you, it's only a surmise. But I suppose you could count on one hand the rich people that Jesus Christ interested in the Kingdom of God. I have a feeling that He never made too much headway with them, and one reason could be was that they didn't have much need -- that is, they thought they didn't have much need. They had arrived, as far as this world was concerned. They allowed themselves to think they had it made.

Oh, Zacchaeus was an exception. I think he had accumulated for himself a handsome pile. But he's the one, you see, who said to Jesus, after he had had an encounter with Christ, "I'm going to change my life-style -- it's going to be different now!" And he did live differently. A man always lives differently after he's had an encounter with Jesus Christ.

But for the most part, as you well know, the people who lived in the day of Jesus were of two strata -- the very rich, and the very poor. He made

His appeal to the poor. He dealt with them much more frequently. And I suppose on this occasion when He told this story, that those poor people listened with baited breath. He loved to tell stories.

This is the story about a man who had made out so well that presumably he didn't have a worry in the world, and these poor people who listened to Jesus Christ for the most part were wondering where their next meal was going to come from. But this man had so much that he had to tear down his barns and build even greater barns to take care of what he had accumulated! To think that some day this could happen! - - but never to happen to them. But it did happen....and in this world there was somebody who made out that well.

They were intrigued, fascinated, as well they would be. But then they got the jolt, and Jesus Christ pulled the rug out from underneath them by saying, "The man's a fool!"

> ...a man is a fool who made out that well? -- whose investments were wise? -- who was able to garner his resources so well? -- you call a man a fool?....,

I don't know that Jesus Christ ever used stronger language than when he dealt with this man, and to refer to him, and call him a fool.

Why did He call him a fool? Why did He condemn him? Surely not because he was rich, you've got to remember that, my friend. Surely not because he had worked as hard as he did. But Jesus Christ said he's a fool....

> ....he was a fool because he allowed himself to believe that he had arrived....
>
> ....he was a fool because he allowed himself to believe that he had it made....
>
> ....he was a fool because he was permitting himself to believe that he could live his life without

reference to God.....

....he was a fool for allowing himself to think that

he could deny himself an eternal dimension....

...he looked ahead, alright, but he didn't look ahead far enough.

I'm always impressed with I read the Scriptures, how much time Jesus spent in trying to get people to look ahead, to think of what was yet to come, to think of what lies beyond. He introduced such words as "Heaven" - - and surely that's beyond this world. He introduced such things as "The Kingdom of God" which has a dimension beyond this present relationship. He talked in terms of "Eternal Life".....He talked in terms of "Judgment" - - and all because He wanted people to think ahead.

I have a friend who when I last saw her, introduced me to the fact that she's gung-ho now for an interesting philosophy: she's giving her life to seven-year cycles. I shan't attempt to tell you how old she is now, but suppose when she was 33 she thought in terms of 40...and at 40 she thought in terms of 47....and it 47 (I'm sure she isn't that age now) she'll be thinking in terms of 54.....61.....68. Being a vain person, she is recognizing that the inevitable gray will come, and the wrinkles, and maybe the double chin. She's looking ahead and trying to think what it's going to be like when she reaches that next seven-year cycle. There's something to be said for it.

And I have friends who, as they near retirement, think very earnestly about what lies ahead in the manner of their living, in what lies ahead.... there's something to be said for it. This man, in the story that Jesus told, was looking ahead, but he didn't look far enough ahead. He didn't look ahead to the things beyond this world. And Jesus Christ condemns him not because he was rich.....and Jesus Christ condemns him not because he was wise. He condemns him because he stopped and didn't go beyond the point that he had

reached . . . in fact he had reached the point where he could say, "I can take it easy now" . . . a man has to be very careful when he finds himself saying to himself -- this is a man, you see, who is saying to himself: "Take it easy -- eat -- drink -- be merry!" The sad thing about that was, that having reached that point he didn't much care about anybody else. He had it made, and he didn't much concern himself about anybody else who didn't have it made.

When I used to go to New York City, I think it was probably United Givers Fund who had coined the phrase -- it was some enterprising group that was gathering funds, trying to arouse the consciousness of that city to be concerned, and I can still see it on the subway card, on the buses and the billboards -- it jolted me at first: GIVE A DAMN! . . . GIVE A DAMN! They weren't caught up with people who didn't give a damn for other people. And that's the terrible sin about this man who thought he had it made. He didn't much care about other people. That was the besetting sin. And you and I, whatever our situation in life, no matter to what degree we think we may have it made, must be very careful lest we don't much care about other people. He had accumulated this world's goods, but he had never mastered the lesson that he couldn't take it with him. He never realized there were no pockets in a shroud.

One of the most ridiculous cartoons I think I ever saw represented the fact that a man presumably whose days were numbered, sitting up in his deathbed, with whatever strength he could gather.....clipping coupons!...not realizing that he couldn't take it with him.

I tell you it's a fact, there was that household on a certain street in a certain city where when somebody came to the door, and the person who answered the door thought that they were gathering funds for some cause and not even waiting to find out what the person had to say, as she opened the door she said, "The people who live here aren't interested in anything." And that's

the sad indictment to be made against any number of people that some of us happen to know - - they're not much interested in anything beyond themselves, and particularly as they've reached the plateau where they think they have it made.

But if I understand the mind of God aright, no one ever has it made as far as God's concerned, except as he allows himself to know the benefit of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. And then living as the redeemed, he allows himself to become a channel of God's grace and ministers to the needs of other people. It's only that person who can allow himself to live out the days of his years, relying heavily upon the grace of God, who knows that he will eventually arrive at his destination. But in the meantime it's very reckless for any person to live out his life without reference to God, to deny himself the eternal dimension and foolhardily to think he has it made.

When I began my ministry the people in that parish took pride in the fact that they had a church organ, and they said, "You know what -- we've dubbed it the 'Carnegie Organ'." Well some of you may not know this, but Andrew Carnegie, bless his soul, when he had accumulated much of this world's wealth, reached the place in life where he realized that it was meant to be used.....and as part of his philanthropic gestures, he would say to a congregation: "It's a pipe organ you need? - - well, I'll help you to get one -- you gather half of the money, the first half, and I'll give you the second half!" And that happened here and there across the face of America. He did it, the same thing, with libraries in certain communities, and I think I'm right when I tell you that it was Andrew Carnegie who said -- now listen to this! -- "It's a sin to die rich" . . . or not to make the necessary distribution of funds that remain after one finishes his earthly pilgrimage to bring a blessing into the lives of other people. This is the tragedy of this man.

Ah, he was a smart boy, and clever, and shrewd, and a hard worker! But all without any reference to God. And one day when you and I finish our earthly pilgrimage - - and we will be judged, of course we will be judged! -- by how we've cared and been concerned. And what's this marvelous Gospel that you and I cherish in the name of Jesus Christ all about, except God so loved, God so cared, that He gave! The people who have left their mark upon the world have always been those who cared -- enough -- to share with other people.

I'd better read this for you again:

> "And he said to them, "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; . . . "
>
> (and here's where that uncomfortable free translation can come in)
>
> " . . . you don't have to give a damn for anybody else - - take your ease! - - eat! - - drink! - - be merry. . . . "

But God said to him - - - and you're not forgetting it, are you, God will always have the last word - - - "Thou fool, this night thy sould shall be required of thee. What then?"

....now you think about that for a while.....

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost — August 21, 1977

"AMID THE ROBBERIES OF LIFE"

Judges 18:24

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

When the Associate Pastor of this congregation puts on my desk the plans and programs that he's envisioned, I usually read with more than ordinary interest the list of those whom he has chosen to assist, to those whom he will assign a measure of leadership responsibility.

I never read any list more seriously than I read the list of those that he's chosen to serve as the staff when he takes a group of our youngsters to camp. Now that's been especially true a week ago when they went to Chesapeake Center, when 90 of our Junior High age youngsters spent a week there. And as I go over that list, knowing him as I do, I know exactly why he has chosen certain people.

One qualification that he expects to be met is that each one of them be strong and of sterling character, that there's no question about their Christian commitment. I was not surprised to discover a grandfather who was listed in the roster. I happen to know him, and know him very well. I know what as happened to him as he served in the military, his experiences elsewhere, and what a fine Christian man he happens to be.

The other is a woman who traveled some 200 miles, a former member of this parish, to serve as an advisor and as a member of the faculty at camp. And I'm going to make you privy to this information now, as to why he happens to have chosen her - - she places a high value upon the things that matter most.....

...one of the most remarkable women I have ever met. And I'll give you some insight as to the strength of her character....

I sat with her once, and I said, "How did you happen to get this way? -- a woman of tremendous strength!"

"Well," she said, "I suppose I should tell you, I grew up on a farm, and I remember once seeing our house burn to the ground, and everything that we seemed to have owned to be lost. It taught me a lesson, that there are things that can be taken away.... ...and then another thing happened when I was quite young -- I fell down a well on our farm, and there in the darkness of that hole, hour after hour, I did a lot of serious thinking. I was rescued, of course, but the lesson that I learned in that well remains to this day, that there are some things that could be taken away."

I come to this sacred desk this morning with some of this as a background, to announce now the title for today's sermon. For want of a better title I'm going to suggest this one: "Amid The Robberies of Life" - - for the fact remains that life can turn robber. Some of the things that you and I cherish and upon which we place a high value can be taken away. The text for this sermon that bears the title "Amid The Robberies of Life" is from an exceedingly interesting chapter in the Book of Judges, and for our purpose this morning it's the 24th verse of the 18th chapter of the Book of Judges. A man is crying out, "You have taken away my silver and my god - - what do I have left?"

Tucked away in the pages of the Old Testament, which is unexplored territory for many people, is this very interesting story about a man and his mother. And I presume he was the only son of this woman. She was very resourceful, she had skimped, she had saved. She had accumulated quite a bit of money. . . .

. . . now they didn't have ways by which they could invest their

money as you and I have today....there were no strong boxes in a bank that would be available. But because she placed a high value upon this money which was hers, and because she wanted to protect it and to keep it, she tried to find a hiding place here and there...she didn't put it all in one place, of course, and then she decided it might serve her purpose better if she'd change the hiding places occasionally... ...and she got quite uptight about this, trying to keep what was hers.

. . . this son of hers would sleep at night, but find his sleep disturbed by this prowling mother of his as she went around trying to find places where she could hide the different quantities of her money. And one night he got up and followed her, and she wasn't aware of this, of course. And then when they both went back to sleep, unaware that she had been followed, observed, he thought to himself, what will happen now if somebody finds what she's trying to hide? - - it could be stolen, and then she wouldn't have it.....it could be taken away!

...and then his mind went one step beyond this, and presumably it occurred to him that he was the only son and that some day this money could be his. Well now, he reasoned within himself, why run the risk of having somebody steal it before it could be his? And since one day it would be his, why not get it now? . . . . and the rascal, that's exactly what he did, he stole his own mother's money.

But there's one thing he hadn't figured on. If she was uptight trying to keep it, she was even more uptight when it was taken away and she discovered the loss. She was completely unsettled and almost bereft of her senses — part of a superstitious

age at that time -- she cried out to the gods to bring down a curse upon the culprit who had stolen her money.

Now he became the unsettled one. He was the marked man. She was superstitious enough to believe that the gods could destroy him, and with a troubled conscience, or whatever you want to call it, he finally admitted to his mother that he had done what he had done. After she got over the initial jolt and shock that her son, her only son, would rob her, they became reconciled, and then together they had this passion, this concern for this money, and they said, "What are we going to do?"

...because, if it could be stolen once, it could be stolen by an outsider.....

...so they came to a very clever conclusion -- they decided that they would take the silver and fashion it into a god, and who in heaven's name would be vain enough, sacrilegious enough to steal a god? So they thought they had it made: they kept their silver intact, and they'd be recognized in the community as god-fearing people...reverent.

But there's one thing they didn't figure on.....oh, I should also tell you that one day there came in the community -- this is very interesting -- a wandering Levite, a priest. So the son latched on to the priest and he said, "You be our own personal priest! -- you be our own chaplain -- you live with us and you conduct the worship before our idol." Well, you see, what more could you ask? -- somebody to keep a constant eye on your silver god!

But there happened to be in those days, in that section of the country, a lawless band of the sons of Dan, and 600 of them wandered around as robbers. One of their scouts came this way this time, and peered into the tent where Micah lived with his mother, and saw the silver idol. You know of course what he did - - he stole it -- took

the priest along with him. Then Micah and his mother discovered their great loss. They gathered together a handful of people, they chased the robbers -- to no avail of course -- and all that the son can do is say this: "You've taken away my silver and my god - - what do I have left?" And the look of anguish upon his face gives the answer. For him - - nothing.

I come to this sacred desk this morning to remind you that there are two things that you ought to do. One, you ought to sit down sometime -- and there's nothing wrong with it -- and make an inventory of all the things that carry your name, the things that belong to you, you've earned them, you've acquired them or they've been given to you. You might be amazed sometime to discover how much you really have. It's a good thing to do.

The second thing you ought to do is to then ask yourself the searching question: Suppose every single one of these things could be taken away from me - - what then? It could happen, you know.

I've a friend who used to call me "Padre" . . and I remember once he invited me to go with him to the country where he had hundreds upon hundreds of acres, and he and I alone one time walked up the stream and our eyes would look up to the hills, to the woodlands, acre after acre, and I discovered in his eye that sense of pride of possession.....and much to my amazement he used those very words and he said, "Padre, there is such a thing as the pride of possession -- these things belong to me!"

And I try never to be less than the pastor that God wants me to be, and I said to him in that moment, "Suppose you'd lose it? Suppose all of this would be taken away from you? -- what then?" And he answered very honestly, "I never really thought about that." And that's the way you and I go from day to day for the most part, seldom realizing that the things that we prize and value could be taken away.

I began my ministry during part of the Depression, and I also remember in the days of my youth what prosperity was like -- and then when the crash came. In that first parish that I was privileged to serve there was a man who once told me that he went to bed at night worth a half-million dollars, and then before he went to bed the next night he was penniless. I'm glad he told me, because I could appreciate what it meant to him and how he faced it. It had been taken away. And then he asked himself the question: what do I have left?

I know what he had left, he didn't have to tell me . . .

-- he had his good name, his honor, his integrity...he had a driving ambition to rise above this apparent failure, to garner whatever resources he had left, physically speaking, emotionally speaking, to make good again before he died. Which he did!

What did he have left?

-- a circle of love, a wife who believed him, a son and a daughter who respected him and they encouraged him, they remained faithful....they didn't love him just because of the bank balance he once had....

What did he have left?

-- the kind of thing he experienced every time he marked the path that led to God's House! -- the faith in the eternal purposes of God that would be served come wind or weather, in wealth or in poverty.

I ask myself the question too -- has this little place in the country to which we enjoy resorting whenever we can.....there are vandals in those hills, there are robbers on the loose, and Winifred and I don't have to say to each other, but we can read each other's minds, when we bolt the door and head back to Silver Spring we ask ourselves the question: will it be intact when we get back? Suppose it were to be taken away?

I've a brother, next younger than I, whose health is being taken away. I prize health as much as you do. It could be lost. These TV commercials deal only in half-truths -- I know what they mean when they say: When you have your health you have everything! But I also know that a person's health can be taken away. And when that's taken away, what is there left?

Chances are there isn't a single one of you aside from Winifred and me who ever met her who are members of Saint Luke Church. Her name was Esther Maria Katerina Benson -- who for almost three decades was immobilized by arthritis. She was a resident of Bethphage Mission in Axtell, Nebraska. She knew what it was to have her health taken away. But she also knew what it was to discover that there was something that still remained, and that was her faith in God, and with the recognition that His purpose was still to be served when the body was wracked by pain. I tell you this because no one who is a member of this congregation, I dare say, ever prayed more fervently that this congregation would go about God's work in the same way that Esther Benson prayed for it. She read every issue of Saint Luke MESSENGER -- she identified as best she could with everything that we were doing, and she looked upon herself as a prayer priest for this congregation. And I would like to believe in Heaven above she's still making intercession for us. And her health was taken away!

"You've taken away my silver....you've taken away my idol! What have I left?" Micah had nothing left. But it didn't have to be that way. You who know the priceless gem which we have in our Christian faith, you who know what it is to have an indomitable will, to face the vicissitudes of life, you who know what it is to be surrounded by a circle of love -- I used to say that if I, simply from a human perspective, looked upon the Christian church, aside from offering me the saving grace of Jesus Christ, I'd want to be a member of the Christian family because it gives me a circle of love, encompasses me with people who care, whose devotion remains when everything else could be taken away.

It's not much for poetry, but the thought can sear your soul:

" . . O the night was dark and the night was late,
When the robbers came to rob him;
They picked the locks of the palace gate,
The robbers that came to rob him;
They picked the locks of the palace gate,
Seized his jewels and gems of state,
His coffers of gold and his priceless plate,
The robbers who came to rob him.

But loud laughed he in the morning red,
For of what had the robbers robbed him?
O hidden, safe, as he slept in bed,
And the robbers came to rob him,
They robbed him not of a golden shred
Of the childish dreams in his wise old head ---
And they're welcome to all else, he said,
When the robbers came to rob him. . . "

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost August 28, 1977

"TO A NOBLER USE"

WE ARE grateful, O God, for all those who have taught us respect for the Holy Page. By Your Holy Spirit enable us to better understand what has been written for our profit today. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who is the Living Word. Amen.

Exodus 38:8

If it's a title that you'll be wanting for today's sermon, let me suggest these words: "To A Nobler Use." There's a text, of course, and quite frankly and very honestly I realize that I read it to you with some risk. You might understand the meaning of that later on. It's the 38th chapter of the Book of the Exodus, and it's the 8th verse:

> "And he made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of the looking-glasses of the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation."

I say I read that text to you at some risk because it surely isn't very exciting. It's quite uninteresting.

And I think I could understand if some of you would say to yourselves, well if that's the text for the sermon, I'll just throw myself in neutral at this point, because I don't expect anything very inspiring. Well, let me read it for you again:

> "And he made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of the looking-glasses of the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation."

....and it still doesn't turn you on, does it? This is true for other passages in the Bible as well - - at first glance they're uninteresting and surely not very inspiring.

Now because this happens to be true, I have two suggestions for you when

you turn to the Bible, and I hope you'll keep them in mind. I share them with you out of my own experience because they have been my salvation on more than one occasion.

The first is that whenever you read the Bible, you should offer a prayer. Just as you sit down to eat a meal and you bow your head in gratitude for what's in front of you, for what's been prepared for you, and in that prayer chances are you'll also add that it might be to the strengthening of your body -- by the same token, whenever you turn to the Holy Scriptures you should offer a prayer before you begin to read, to thank God that you do have this bread of life, and to ask the Holy Spirit to help you to understand what is there.

The second suggestion that I have for you is a very simple one, and one that may not have occurred to some of you. And it's right and proper that you should do it: you ask God to give you a sanctified imagination as you read that particular chapter dealing with a particular incident or occasion. And that is simply to suggest that when you read you ask God to help you to imagine what it was like -- who the people were who happened to be there, and then to be able to appraciate somehow the interplay of forces that were at work! You can't possibly understand Scripture if you can't identify with the event or the occasion or the people involved....

...Now that's what I have been doing as I've prepared this sermon for you this morning, and I want to give you, if you don't mind, the benefit of this sanctified imagination.....

Well, to begin with, imagine yourself back when this thing happened, and you have to go all down the corridor of time until you come to the time when the Children of Isreal were in bondage to the Egyptians. Now this is very interesting. Because they were in bondage they were naturally enslaved and they did not receive wages as you and I think in terms of wages from their

master. Their master saw that they were fed, housed and clothed — their physical needs were cared for. It was to his advantage as a master, of course, to have a healthy and a good slave on his hands.

But, every now and then I'm inclined to think that one of these fellows, one of these enterprising Israelites, would be able to get into his possession some precious coins.....maybe he would find them, maybe his master, in a beneficent mood, would give him a coin or two. Well be that as it may, he had some coins.

...And then in all likelihood he would say to himself, now that I have it I'm going to buy something with it for the woman that I love....

Now just because marriages were arranged in those days, don't you permit yourself to think for a single minute that romantic blood would not course through the veins of some of those Israelites. And even though the wife to whom he was married was the result of an arrangement, in all likelihood he learned to love her, and he wanted to give her some evidence of his love. You can understand this. So he goes into the bazaar and he bargains and he gets her something. And then there comes that moment when he can give it to her, and he calls her by name: "Rebecca!" - - "Sarah!" - - "Rachel!" - -

" . . . guess what! I've got something for you, and
I think you'll like it! You can guess if you want to,
but I can't wait. Here it is! . . . "

....and this is what it was: a looking-glass — a mirror, a hand-mirror!

They had no such things as you and I know them today, not a glass mirror, but a mirror made out of polished metal in which she could see her reflection. And you can understand how valuable this would be to a woman. Chances are the only time she saw her reflection was when she looked into a pail of water, and that wasn't a very handy thing to carry around to serve as a mirror.....thrilled to high heaven by this thing that she now

had - - a token of love, representative of sacrifice from one person in particular, she prized it, as well she should.

Turn the pages of history.....the time comes when God says to the Children of Israel, "We'll be on the march now, the promised land is going to be yours." And then you deal with that whole great and wonderful chapter known as the Exodus.

But you're mistaken if you think it was a very well organized thing, where they had days and weeks to get ready and to pack everything that belonged to them.....it was like a flight in the night, honestly it was. And they could take with them only the things that they could wear on their backs and perhaps carry in their hands. And then that moment came when the decision had to be made -- not only what we could take, but what we would have to leave behind.....and here is this woman who had received this precious looking-glass. Do you think for a single minute she's going to part with it? Somehow, somewhere she'll always find a place where she can tuck it in and take it with her. And so she did.

Now turn the pages of history again....they're wandering around as a bunch of nomads, so it would appear, on their way to the Promised Land. And then in God's plan for them: "Alright, you can have a tabernacle -- you can have a place of meeting -- you can call it your worship center." Well now remember, they were moving around, they were on the march, they were not an established people yet. Where would they get these things? -- only as they could make them and fashion them themselves. And in the Book of Exodus, certain sections of it, does make valuable reading as to how they prepared the tabernacle, the place of meeting.

And now - - bear with me - - one of the items that they had to have as a part of the furnishings of the place of meeting would be involved in their ablutions, that is, it was simply a basin that was filled with water, a big

basin no less, to accommodate all the administering servants and pilgrims who might come from some distance. And this basin -- laver -- was to be a regular item. And in it they would bathe their hands and their feet. It was part of their ritual.

Now, you and I can't appreciate it very much because we don't use that sort of thing today. But for them it was essential. And I can well imagine the building committee getting together and saying, "We've taken care of this...we've taken care of that....." And God bless them, they wouldn't have to worry about permits in those days!

> ....and then Moses says, How about this laver? For the life of me I don't know how we're going to get it made, but we've got to have one."

And some fellow spoke up and said, "Well how about taking our battle-axes and the like and getting them melted down?"

> ...and I suppose a fellow said, "Man, you're crazy! We haven't arrived yet -- we still have a lot of enemies with whom we have to deal. That isn't a very good idea."

And then in all likelihood a woman stands up, and she says, "I've got the answer!" And they all look at her...and she reaches under her garments and pulls out this hand-polished mirror....reverently she puts it on the ground in front of her, and she says, "And now I challenge every woman here to do the same thing. You fellows can melt these into this big basin that we need. That's the way we'll get it!"

Now let me read this for you:

> "And he made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, out of the looking-glasses of the women who were assembled at the door of the place of meeting."

And I think that's the way it was. What they had they gave up to a nobler use!

Now why whould I ask you to pay attention to this text today when I come to the sacred desk? There are two reasons.

One, I think it is an exceedingly salutary thing for every one of us, every now and then, to sit down and make an inventory-of-sorts of very precious things that have been given to us, that represent sacrifice on the part of those who love us. And the gift in itself represents their personality and their devotion. I can well imagine, as the husband might have been killed in battle or as he may have died along the way, that there were those precious moments when the woman would reach for that hand-polished mirror, and see it as a silent emblem of precious love and devotion.

You and I are the recipients of many kindnesses on the part of people, and some of them represent the very essence of their being. In this family of God which we call the Christian church we recognize that repeatedly whenever we come to receive Holy Communion - - "Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and when He blessed it He broke it and said, Take, eat; this is My body given for you - - Take, drink, this is my blood given for you - - this is I -- all that I am I offer you." How fortunate we are within this family of God to recognize how God gives Himself for us, and sacrificially.

It's a salutary thing for a person to take stock of what he has that's been given to him out of sheer devotion and with a degree of sacrifice.

I'm wondering if you'll indulge me for a moment as I do occasionally, share with you a page out of my own life. When I began my ministry I had the good fortune to follow a man who had been in that parish for almost fifty years, a man whose heart was as big as the world -- every inch a pastor and a good shepherd of souls. About forty years ago now he gave me

a present for Christmas. And when he gave it to me I was disappointed. I'll tell you what it is -- I use it almost every Sunday morning, it's part of my Sunday morning getting ready for you. I have it here in my study at the church: it's a shoe-shine box. It's made out of black walnut. He liked to work with his hands....it has some very attractive carving on it. For some of the hinges he took some of the old church carpet and fashioned the hinge out of it that way. But when I first saw it I thought to myself, why, this is something old -- it's been used! For heaven's sake, why did he give me a cast-away?

(He never knew that I reasoned that way, but I did)

...why couldn't you have gotten me something brand new, something that you could have purchased at the store?

Now that I'm older, I realize what a precious thing it was that he gave me. It was something that he had made, and he had made it well. It was something of himself that he was giving to me. And I prize it so much that I hope some day to pass it on to Pastor David, or to Jon, and I'll tell them the same thing that I'm telling you. Again I say, we need to sit down and recognize how much we have that's been given to us that represents the indelible stamp of the personality of the giver.

And the second thing -- you may never have thought of this, and I'm reluctant to give it to you because you may misunderstand me. But no matter how prized may be the possessions that we have, we need to ask ourselves frequently, is there a nobler use to which it can be put? What right do I have to keep it for myself and for myself alone? These women of the looking-glass came to a particular point in time when they knew that there was a nobler use to which this thing could be put, that it could bear the stamp of God in none other way than by having the person relinquish its use to a nobler and greater use.

God has given us life, an exceedingly precious thing. How frequently do we ask ourselves, are we releasing this life of ours to a nobler and better use than is now being served? God has given us the capacity to love and to care - - how frequently do we ask ourselves, since this is an exceedingly precious thing -- to what noble end do I love? And I who have the gift of life -- to what nobler purpose do I live?

Dear old Elwood DeLong, that octogenarian who left his stamp of beauty upon this chancel and the Chapel of the Grateful Heart - - he used to say, "Raymond, whatever you do, don't ever live just somehow, but learn to live triumphantly!" Every now and then you and I ought to sit down and say to ourselves, it is true that we're simply existing, going through the hum-drum monotonous routine of one day after another - - - life was never meant to be lived that way. It was meant to be lived for a nobler purpose! And there's no nobler purpose than where it bears undeniably and indelibly the stamp of God.

She did a far nobler thing than she had ever done before, that woman with the looking-glass, the polished mirror, when she gave it up, for God. Now you think about that.....you think about it.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ON MAKING THE MOST OF IT"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Luke 5:27-28

The text is from the 5th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, verses 27 and 28:

> " After this (meaning Jesus) he went out and saw the tax collector named Matthew, sitting at the tax office. He said to him, Follow me. And he left everything and rose and followed him. . . "

...and I think it happened just like that. And some of you here this morning perhaps envy him a great deal, to be able to walk away from the place where you have been working and not ever to be able to return again. Just think of it.....to gather up all the material from your desk, stuff it in your brief-case, walk away, and say, "That's it! I won't go back. I don't have to go back."

Matthew was able to do it. But chances are you can't. So what? Well let's first just say to ourselves that if you should be the kind of person who finds yourself in that situation, it may be true for a number of different reasons.

First....you're bored. The work is no longer challenging.

....or it could be the type of people with whom you have to work, they're not very compatible and certainly not very congenial, and so you wish that you were somewhere else....

....or it could be that you have been at your work so long that now you find it a rather monotonous routine thing that no longer brings a challenge to you....

....occasionally, now, it could be that you're a misfit, and

you shouldn't have been in that position to begin with! and maybe the answer does lie in moving on and going on somewhere else.

Whatever may be the reason, if you should be numbered among those who wish that they could walk away, when you think of your work -- its frustration after frustration, maybe a degree of failure after failure, and most certainly one disappointment after another.

If you were to press me as to what might be the prevailing mood in the minds of a number of people that I know, I would have to say that they have to wrestle with a series of disappointments. Somewhere along the line we've allowed ourselves to believe that in this business of living we would reach a time when everything would fall into place. But wise indeed is the man who sees that life is just one series of problems after another.

But be careful that you don't become cynical, as indicated in the columnist in yesterday morning's paper, who said that she had seen a bumper sticker that had read simply: LIFE IS A FAILURE OPPORTUNITY -- which means get ready for it -- you're not going to get very far, and you're not going to produce very much, and in all likelihood you won't succeed. Now that's the cynic's way of looking at it - - Life is a failure opportunity.

And if this mood should prevail in your mind where you happen to be, you could envy Matthew, who could walk away from it, and improve his situation. But you can't. Is that true?

I know a measure of satisfaction in going back and reading some of the things that were written when I began my ministry and when I was still in theological seminary. It's surprising how much that I read then is relevent to what you and I experience today. Let me read this for you....the person who had written this was observing the human scene, and he came to the conclusion that the characteristic of his generation (about four decades ago now)

was that people were suffering from disappointment. He said, "We have lived through one long series of major disappointments, to go no further than back to the great war (World War #1). We plunged into that, hoping to make the world safe for democracy, only to recognize later that the outcome was futile. And then to plan to organize people in the World Court -- League of Nations. Many of us turned to these with high hopes, and we have lived to see the great buildings on Lake Geneva become empty shells while millions march off to war all over again. Then there was a day of economic affluence. It seemed a dawn filled with hope of abundance of life for all people....only to fade into wide-spread penury that at that time no help could reach. Even so we did not believe that the nations would madly head to this, another world conflict. But today Europe and Asia are aflame. We have lived through a generation of successive and colossal disappointments, one frustrating hope piled upon another . . . "

> ...and if I gave you time, some of you could stand up and say, "I can update that for you, Pastor, for this is the story of my life today!"

And so it could well be that you might give anything if you could, as Matthew did, walk away from where you are, and believe that your situation could be improved.

But suppose you can't? And that's the thing with which we need to wrestle right now. For any number of you, you've got to go back Tuesday to where you were Friday. And you're the one who left and said, "Thank God it's Friday!" -- because you welcome the respite. Now what's to be said for a person who can't change his situation?

Well, as a Christian you can deal with your predicament, and as a Christian you begin to do this sort of thing: you analyze as best you can why it

is that you're ineffective, unhappy, or incompatible. You do that as best you can. And then you examine the possibility, where could I go? and what would I do? And if there are no open doors and you find that you have to stay where you are, then you ask God to give you the grace and strength to make the most of that situation. And the answer may not lie in changing the situation as much as it may lie in changing an attitude.

I can give this to you on good authority. Take our Blessed Lord as an example. Do you think that He found Himself in a happy situation every day of His life? He most certainly did not.

....and think how frustrating it must have been for Him, who at the age of twelve said, "I'm going to be about my father's business . . . "...and then for eighteen years He worked in a carpenter's shop before He could preach His first sermon. This same Christ who dealt with people as He did, and kept His eye on the ultimate goal and the purposes to be served in His life where He happened to be. Was He less honest when He delivered yoke for oxen than when He preached the Sermon on the Mount? Was He less compassionate when He dealt with a youngster who came with his father to have a lintel made for a house in Joseph's carpenter shop than when He touched the man with the infirmity and gave him a healing miracle?

...said the poet: "What was He doing all that time,
From boyhood then to early prime?
Was He then idle, or the less
About His father's business?"

So we do the best we can by the grace and strength of Jesus Christ, realizing that perhaps there is a ministry that we can offer as we're fulfilling a part of God's plan. And if this is to be true, then God gives the grace and the strength that we might be able to stay where we are, if there are no other open doors.

It's as homespun now as I can make it for you. Little Annie Kieg — many

of you remember her and recognize her of course. She fractured her hip, she was in the hospital, and now she's in a nursing home for rehabilitation....

> ...she's the one who gathers up the bulletins at the close of the service and straightens out the books in the pew racks, talks to you, takes care of the Child Care Room and the Sunday School office.....

Well Annie isn't making a very easy adjustment. She can't get up and go. She can't be the independent thing that she's always been. That's one reason why she left the convent, you know -- she's like a bird that was never meant to be caged.

When I saw her yesterday she had tears in her eyes -- she just couldn't quite make the adjustment to her present situation. And then I talked to her as strongly as I could, and I said, "Now listen, Annie, you're crying. How in heaven's name can you see the beauty of the faces of people around you when you're crying? And as long as these tears are in your eyes you're going to be blind to the people who are standing by trying to help you, and to encourage you. Now Annie, for heaven's sake, you are where you are, and just as you were meant to be a ray of sunshine to people in Saint Luke Church when you came to us, for the time being you're meant to be a ray of sunshine to these people here!" You do the best with what you can, where you are, until by the grace of God something else may happen. In Matthew's case, he could move on. Maybe in your case you can't. But by the grace of God, be faithful to Him, where you are.

* * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - The Rev. Raymond Shaheen
The Festival of Harvest October 9, 1977

"ON BEING IMPATIENT"

Deut 11:11

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

There are some advantages to living in a city, of course. There are any number of advantages living in a rural area. There's a great deal to be said for living in a pastoral situation, where people live very close to the good earth, where what they would gather at the harvest depended upon what they sowed in the spring-time, the way they cultivated it, watered it and fertilized it. There are certain lessons to be learned as one reflects upon the good earth and the productive field.

Here in Saint Luke, despite the fact that we are in a metropolitan area, we cling tenaciously to the concept that the Festival of the Harvest should be celebrated. For some of us, it is reminiscent of what we experienced in the days of our childhood and youth, when we lived in a village or in a rural area. But for anyone who marks the path that leads to this place this day, let him recognize all over again by this the evidence of the fruits of the good earth, that it is by the Lord's hand, it is from the Lord's bounty, that we are sustained. Nature, if anything, to the spiritually sensitive, reminds man of his dependence on God.

Suppose you were standing now where I'm standing and you were to be the preacher for the day, and even though the bulletin that you have in your hands indicates the fact that the sermon will deal with the theme, what would you detect as the theme-of-themes that ought to be dealt with on a Sunday that marks the Festival of the Harvest? Whether or not you'll get some hint as to

what you're about to hear by the reading of the text, allow me to read it now without further delay. It's from the First Lesson that you heard, from the Book of Deuteronomy, the 11th chapter, the 11th verse:

> ". . . But the land which you go in to possess, it is a land of hills and valleys, and drinks water by the rain from heaven . . . ."

God chooses His words wisely and carefully. And if you were in my shoes this morning, you'd recognize the responsibility that rests upon the preacher to share with you the element of truth to be gleaned from this particular text:

> ". . . drinks water by the rain from heaven . . "

Let me give you a bit of background. It's very real to me because a number of years ago when I first visited the Middle East and then went down into North Africa and into Egypt, on the outskirts of Cairo I scaled, to a certain measure, the Pyramid, the Great Pyramid, and from that vantage-point I looked round about me. And it seemed to me as though I'd deliberately drawn a demarcation point -- it was green thus far, and then the desert took over.

I was fully aware of what this meant. In Egypt they irrigate their fields. Whatever harvest they would gather was dependent upon the amount of water that they would churn into the field from the irrigation ditches.....

> ...I remember so well seeing also, there along the road, an Egyptian peasant, lying down alongside of an Archimedean screw -- actually churning water from one channel into the main irrigation ditch into the field. By his feet he was propelling, so it would seem....

And as Mr. Shaffer read the Lessons for you, you heard again "water by foot"...

> ...who hasn't traveled in the East and seen the water boy, with a rod across his shoulders, suspended on either side the bucket filled with water which he carries out into the field?

This is primitive -- it can be seen this very day. And God, now, is speaking

to the Children of Israel and He's saying - - "You remember how it was? -- when you were down there in Egypt you carried by foot the water into the field...you churned by your feet the water into the field.....you made the irrigation possible. It was by your efforts that these things happened . . . but in the Promised Land, it's going to be different -- a land of hills and valleys by which the rain will bring the water from the heaven . . . "....as much as to say, "You will be completely dependant upon me -- you'll have to trust me. The rain will come when I see fit. You'll have to trust me."

But that's alright, you see, if man could do it easily. And this is the problem of problems that God always has with us -- getting us to trust Him, getting us to believe Him. That's one of the lessons that God was trying to teach through Moses, the leader of the Children of Israel, but every now and then man becomes impatient with God. And if it's a title for this sermon that you're wanting, there it is: "On Being Impatient."

If nature teaches us any lesson, it's the lesson of patience. Honestly now. I'm so grateful that when I grew up I could grow up as a kid in a small town, where almost every person in town had his vegetable plot in the back yard. They used to smile broadly when they'd say that the influence of the Pennsylvania Dutch extended up into Northern Central Pennsylvania because when people built their houses they built them very close to the street. There was no large expanse of lawn in front of the house between the house and the street. No, because they built the house close to the street so that in the back yard practically every foot could be given over to the garden.

I can remember my father getting the seed catalogue, making the selection in winter, and then sending off the order to the post office, waiting eagerly for the seed to be delivered.....and then, bless his soul, he himself would spade the entire plot and plant it. And once the seed was in the ground, cursed with this measure of impatience that seems always to have characterized my life,

I expected the plant to be blooming the next day. But it didn't happen that way. Patiently we waited. The harvest time came only in due season. It was only after a while that we could gather the tomatoes....it was only after a while that we could gather the potatoes.....it was only after a while that we dug the hole in the ground and placed the barrel and stored there for winter use the cabbage, the celery, the carrots.....only after a while.

If nature teaches us any lesson by God's design, it's the lesson of patience. It takes a little while until some things grow and develop and mature. And as God reads history, as God reads life, that's the way it's meant to be.

Now what God is saying to those Children of Israel as they're wandering through the wilderness toward the Promised Land - - "You'll have to learn this lesson of patience - - I am in control, and I will always work for your welfare. But trust me. The rain - - it's going to come from the heaven, according to my time-table." But God has always had on His hands a rebellious people and an impatient lot. There are some folks who when they read the Old Testament say that's one reason why Moses never got into the Promised Land, because as the leader of the Children of Israel, right in front of them one time, he took issue with God, became impatient with Him, and allowed them to see a display of temper which was unbecoming of their leader. There are those who say that God says, "Alright, Moses, because of this the time will come when you will see the promised Land but you will not enter into it." Be that as it may, it's God's attempt to teach us again and again in one way or another to be patient and to trust Him.

Now to be patient simply doesn't mean that one stands by passively -- it isn't to mean that one stands by and says, "I will not be concerned." - - it doesn't mean that I will not do my part. To wait for God to accomplish His purposes, God uses us in the meantime. Does God ever accomplish anything without us?

And to be patient doesn't mean that one stands by and says, "I throw myself in neutral." But it does mean that one has a continuing concern and relies solely upon the wisdom and the providence of God. And that's one of the lessons that God was trying to get over to the Children of Israel through their leader.

But I'm about to suggest to you that we're always on the edge of a brand new world. That's one of the lessons that life has taught me recently. I was foolish enough to believe at a certain time in life that one would reach a plateau, and there would be no new world beyond that. But that isn't true. Again and again God brings us to the edge of a new world -- new experiences, new demands, new challenges. And God is saying to us: "Be patient, now, and trust me. My purposes will be fulfilled." But you and I are impatient. Said one wise man, "The trouble with me is that I'm in a hurry, and God isn't." God can afford to take His time because He's always dealing with the eternal dimension.

Some of us are cursed because we're in a hurry. Romantic now, I read it this way. I don't know how you read it. That's one of the problems with premarital sex -- in a hurry. That's one of the problems with our strained relationships with other people -- we're in a hurry. We want things the way we want them, and we want them by ten o'clock yesterday morning. And people don't always jump through the hoops for us.....just as we don't always jump through the hoops for them.....

> ....it's one of the problems we have as parents -- we're in a hurry with our children. We want them to be grown up overnight.....
>
> ....it's one of the problems that I have with some of you parents sometimes, once your youngsters are confirmed -- you expect him the Sunday after he's been confirmed to be like an

angel fully dropped down from heaven, as though there is something magical about this Confirmation experience to make us fully-grown saints overnight.

It just doesn't happen that way. It takes time to establish trust and respect. It takes time to get to know a person, to know how to work with that person. And this is why, while I'm not faulting my colleagues in the ministry, I could never for the life of me understand how some pastors could jump from one parish to another every 2, 3, 4, 5 years. It takes time to know your people, and to trust your leader.

I should be very grateful indeed, and I say this with humility, if you could feel as I feel that perhaps I'm coming now into my greater usefulness in my relationship with you, as God has given us time to grow. Every Sunday when I am given the important privilage to pronounce the Absolution: "The Almighty and merciful God grant you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins.....time for amendment of life . . . " It takes some of us a little bit longer to become better. Honestly it does.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost October 16, 1977

"FESTIVAL OF PRAISE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

You're entitled to know, of course you are, that any pastor worth his salt would covet for his congregation certain things.

To begin with, he would covet for them that they would be a people who when they gathered together would receive the Word of God, that it would be preached with clarity and with conviction, and that the Lord Jesus Christ would be exalted.

He would also covet for his people that when they come together, they could come to a place that was made ready for them, a place where it would be made easier for them to think the thoughts of God.....where the very physical structure would be reverent and help to create an atmosphere of reverence ....that the staff with whom he would work would be committed to a pastoral ministry, where each person for whom they have a measure of responsibility would be precious in their sight, even as that person is precious in God's sight.

He would also covet for himself that his people would be a congregation with a social consciousness, that they would be aware of the fact that there are others to whom the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ must be made known -- in word and in deed.

Now if these are the things I would covet for you and for myself in our relationship together, I use them something as a rule of thumb, that if I should find myself in the strange situation of no longer being able to stand in the

pulpit to preach and to shepherd a people, and yet find myself in a situation where I would want to affiliate with a congregation, and I went visiting one congregation after another until I could make the decision as to which would be my hhurch home, there is one thing that I would mentionothat would tilt the scales as far as my choice would be.....

> ...it wouldn't be alone where the Word was preached, nor where the building was kept in good order and where the staff had a concern for people, and where there was a social consciousness.....

...if there were three or four congregations that met all of this criteria, the scales would be tilted in favor of the congregation that was made up of people who sang happily and heartily unto the Lord. For this, too, is the measure of the vitality of the congregation, if they sang happily and heartily unto the Lord.

Turn to one page after another in the Book of Psalms, and again and again and again the Psalmist invites people - - "O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us sing unto the Lord a new song." Tennyson said,"I do but sing because I must." I'm not so sure that you can make people sing. I've never had a measure of enthusiasm for a song leader who would stand up and almost browbeat us into singing - - I've never responded to that kind of a song leader. But I have responded to a song leader who, as he stood up, just by the dynamic of his personality, where I could respect the integrity of his soul and found him believable, he could make me want to sing. "I do but sing because I must" . . . Christians are people who sing....and you know why, don't you?

But quite parenthetically now, let me inject this thought. He said "Call me Mr. Lucky" - - that's what Bing Crosby, when people pressed him for the success of his life -- he called it lucky. And in return he went his way singing. He admitted not so long ago that perhaps he'd never again have

another hit, but he did say, as long as he could he'd go on singing, because helfelt that life was good to him, that the cookie crumbled, in his manner, favorably, and that gave him reason for singing.

Bing Crosby didn't intend to be a preacher, and maybe his response didn't hold water with some theologians, because Christians don't sing because they're lucky. Christians sing for these three reasons, if you don't mind:

- - one, we sing because we have something to sing about. Every single one of us knows himself to be the object of God's love. What is it that puts a song into a man's soul, if not on his lips, but the realization that he's being loved, that he's important to someone, that somebody cares. In years gone by, I smile when I think of that figure of speech, it was the farmer's daughter -- they discovered a change in her personality...she began to blossom. And the old expression was, "Somebody's been paying attention to her." Christians are people who are being paid attention to by God. God loves us, He gave His Son to die for us, we have the hope of Heaven. And while we live we can find meaning in our years. Christians are people who sing because they have something to sing about.

- - two....WE Christians are people who sing because they have someone to whom they can sing. We lift our hearts and voices in adoration to Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know not only what He is, but who He is. We have a close relationship with Him, and when we sing we can't help but sing to Him, in adoration and in praise. - - Christians are people who sing because they have those with whom they can sing, and as they sing with one another they take heart and they know a measure of encouragement as they find themselves within a company of singers. A year ago today some of your fellow members of this parish winged their way to South America as your Senior Pastor was

on special assignment to some of our missionaries in Chile and in Peru.

Part of the assignment was to bring a measure of support to those representatives of Jesus Christ because theirs is a lonely lot and a difficult assignment. We discovered that when our words would fail us, and when perhaps we were not being effective in the presentation of certain studies, on occasion I played the cassette that I took with me -- a recording of last year's Festival of Praise in Saint Luke Church. And that did something for those faltering spirits that we were unable to do ourselves when we ministered to them. When we hear the songs of fellow Christians we take courage.

I have reason to believe that this service is being recorded. Your voices are becoming a matter of record, and in all likelihood a cassette will be sent to a woman who used to be a member of this parish, who still wants to be an associate, even though she lives half a continent away. She measures her life now day by day, and when she hears you singing she'll take heart.

In Liberia, West Africa, Gene and June LeVan are our representatives for Jesus Christ. Gene is the pilot of our plane that's so indispensible there -- they'll get a recording and they'll take courage in their difficult assignment as they hear you sing.

Christians are people who sing because sing they must. They have something to sing about, someone to whom to sing, someone with whom they can sing. I've lived long enough, whether fairly or otherwise I cannot say, but all other things being equal, I do judge people by the singing quality of their soul. Pastor David is not aware of -this -- when he directs our summer camp for junior high age youngsters, that I don't have to ask him "What kind of a staff did you have -- how did it go? -- what do you think?" I have only to expose myself to a bunch of youngsters who have been there, and if when I'm in their company I can be close enough to find that I can hear them sing the songs that they sang at camp....then I have reason to believe that it was a good experience.

Today is the Festival of Praise in Saint Luke Church. Now it's time for us to sing . . . . . (Transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Reformation Sunday October 30, 1977

"A MAN CODE FROM GOD"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

John 1:6

Allow it to cross back and forth upon the horizon of your mind, as this sermon continues to develop, these words from the first chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"There was a man sent from God"

Constantly you and I must remind ourselves that God's preferred instrument, as He seeks to work in and through this world, is always a human being. God, who is all-powerful, of course, may see fit to work through the earthquake, the wind and the fire. But any study of history and any study of the Scriptures indicates so clearly that His preferred instrument is a human being.

There are many ways of appraising the Scriptures. It is God's Word to us, of course it is, it's God's truth. It's God at work in history, it's God at work through His Chosen People. It's God at work through His Church. But no matter how you look at the Bible, there is always looming upon the horizon the figure of a person, or a group of people. Still as of old God's preferred instrument is a human being.

The writer of the lines was absolutely correct when he said:

"God has no hands but our hands,
No feet but our feet,
No lips but our lips . . ."

When God wants to accomplish His purpose He reaches for a human being.

The perfect example of that, of course, is Jesus Christ. When He came to us, He humbled Himself and took on the form of a human being. And to that end He reached for a Mary....He reached for a Joseph. There was a man -- come from God.....now you can supply any name that you may wish as you think of history, but for our purpose this morning I am in duty bound to remind you that not all

human beings serve Him faithfully. We can disappoint Him. And even the Church which He cherishes can become corrupt. And that's the sad truth with which we deal today, because when we talk about Reformation, when we talk about renewal, we talk about something that went wrong, that had to have a restorative touch.

Bear with me as I recite for you what might have been in this manner. In the name of Jesus Christ there was a solemn assembly. A stage had been erected, and on this stage stood a man, with the vestments of the Church adorning his body — with all the prestige and the honor and the glory of the Church he stood among these people. But he did not preach the Gospel. He came to them, so he said to them, as a representative of Jesus Christ and His Holy Church. But from our vantage-point we now call him a tool of the Devil, because what he was doing was this: asking people for money and allowing them to believe that just because they gave the money, they could be guaranteed a seat in Heaven.

The scheme was so diabolical, even though it was being offered in the name of the Church, that the coverage was being increased, to the extent that I could buy a guarantee for a relative of mine, even though I had no assurance that that relative of mine really wanted to go to Heaven! But because I would pay a price, I could be led to believe that I could get him there!

That's a chapter of the history of the Church-- that's an incident that occurred among people who called themselves the Bride of Christ. It did happen. Even the instruments that God may call forth, the people on whom He may rely, may fail Him. A realistic reading of the Church is that it does and has become corrupt because God depends upon us — people such as you and me.

That's one side of the story. The other side of the story, however, remains. And that's exactly why we're here today, because we celebrate the fact that there were such people as the Reformers, who were able to have the Church renewed because they allowed themselves to be used as instruments of God faith-

fully, and with conviction.

If human beings can disappoint God, human beings can also please Him and serve Him. The true treasure of the Church is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that treasure is entrusted into their hands. We are the earthen vessels, but it is possible for us to please and to serve God.

You may not like this when I tell you this, but the forces of evil can invade the Church. While I am perfectly aware of the fact that Jesus Christ said to a man named Peter: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I shall build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." -- not because of Peter's steadfastness, but because the Church happens to be the Church of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ will see that it will not be destroyed. We may fail Him, but Christ will not fail us. And again and ever so often He reaches for someone whom He can use effectively as He was not able to use other people.

Now the truth that needs to grip your soul and mind on this day is this: as we find ourselves within the Church, the Family of God, are we His obedient servants? or are we unwittingly becoming the tools of the Devil? Again I must tell you that the Devil can invade the Church. In fact it's his happy hunting ground -- honestly, I do believe this! For here within the Church is where the prizes are to be found. He can get almost anyone outside the Church very easily, but for those of us who follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, to get some of us into his grip -- that's where he knows a great measure of delight. Why should he waste time on those he can get easily? He steels himself for the battle that he has to wage against us. He does it with a great deal of persistence. And again and again throughout history of the Church he seems to have had his moment, if not his hour.....he seems to have had his hour if not his day....and he seems to have had his decade if not his century.

But as over against that Jesus Christ says, "You are My Church. I will not allow you to be destroyed." And to accomplish His purpose He calls here and there this person and that person to bring the reformers' fire and to offer the restorative touch.

Today we pay tribute to a man named Martin Luther, who became a man of God and faithfully served Him. He did not destroy the great King and Head of the Church. Now how was this possible, and to all practical purposes you and I must remember this -- Martin Luther rooted and grounded himself in the Scriptures. You may remember that great moment in church history, or the history of the world, if you please, when he stood there and he was asked to take back what he was saying. He was asked to change his mind, it was suggested that perhaps it was only a figment of his imagination. And it wasn't simply German stubbornness that made him do it. It was something far greater than that. "Here I stand," he says, "I won't change my mind!" (I have given you a reckless translation -- "You can't get me to take back what I've said. I am gripped, held captive, by the word of God! It is in and through the Scriptures that I say and think these things, and if you can prove me wrong by the Scriptures, go ahead! But otherwise, here I stand!"

One of the things that I covet for this congregation is, as many of you may discover all over again, a greater appreciation for Biblical truth. And that's why I'm especially pleased to know that on Wednesday nights there's going to be this new emphasis on Bible study in mid-week. It isn't enough to know that we come together on Sunday for study of the Scriptures -- we should be constantly searching the Scriptures.

Now having said to you what I've said, about the Devil being at work within the church and allowing it to become corrupt, and how Jesus Christ continues to prevail over and above the Devil as He reaches for human beings to be His instruments -- every single one of us ought to ask himself the question: How do I know whether even as a member of the church, I should be a tool of

the Devil or an instrument in God's hand? How do I know?

From one of the Lessons that Dr. Hesse read for us this morning, Jesus Christ says, "If you continue in my word - - "....and this He was saying to those who believed in Him....."then you will be my disciples." The true mark of the identity of Jesus Christ within the church is the person who believes in Jesus Christ, who knows that his commitment is to Jesus Christ.

That's why in Saint Luke Church whenever a group of new members meets for the first time, I find myself in duty bound to say to them, as some of you may readily recall, "We're happy to greet you here tonight in this New Member Group series, and to talk with you about a possible relationship with this congregation. But that's not our primary interest. Our primary interest is to talk with you about Jesus Christ. For the day when you become a member of Saint Luke Lutheran Church, it's a day when you commit yourself anew to Christ, with the understanding that that expression becomes related in a corporate way to this Family in God that bears the name of a particular congregation.

Somebody once came to John Wesley and said, "Do you know that so-and-so is leaving the Church of England and is going to become a member of another congregation?" John Wesley replied very curtly, and properly so, "A man can be saved in any church . . a man can be damned in any church." He was saying that on good authority because it was Augustine, one of the greatest of the early Church Fathers, who said something like this: "The church has many on its roll whom God does not have on His roll - - and God has many on His rolls whom the church does not have on its roll." It's a sobering thought, my friend. You may take a measure of pride and satisfaction in knowing that you're a member of the Christian Church - - and may your number increase. But the thought remains: Am I, even within the church, an instrument of Christ?....or could I be used by the Devil to allow the Church of Jesus Christ to become corrupted? You and I must constantly ask ourselves that question, because as Martin Luther said, speaking of our discipleship, "At best we offer Jesus Christ rotten wood out of which to carve, and a lame horse to ride . . . "

* * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

KEY WORDS OF ADVENT - "REPENT"

Matthew 3:1

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Since with God all time is as an instant, suppose now He gave you the privilege of an instant replay - - for what moment would you ask? Suppose God said to you, "I'll play back for you now anything that was exceedingly wonderful that happened since the world was created" - - what moment would you want recalled?

- - would you like to have God put in front of you right now the time He called Abraham to be the chosen leader of the Chosen People? That really was something, when God had an old man act in faith, to see a promise fulfilled... and when his wife laughed at the possibility of giving birth to a child in her old age....

Tell me, what would you like to have instantly replayed?
Since with God all time is as an instant, would you like to have portrayed in front of you now God calling Moses to Mt. Sinai, and giving him the tablets, the Ten Commandments which have served us and serve us so well, which can never be ignored?

Tell me now that instant replay --

-- would you choose the time the angels sang, and heralded for us the birth of Jesus Christ?

--- or is that the moment that you would like to have replayed: Jesus Christ coming into the world? or Jesus Christ going out of the world?

...you pay your money and you take your choice, maybe. What would you like to have instantly replayed?

What may be your choice I don't know, but let me tell you mine. Inspired by today's Gospel lesson, the very mention of the man's name, surely I would want to choose this, at least today -- the replay of the appearing on the scene of that eccentric -- in the jargon of today's youth, an oddball to be sure -- a man named John the Baptist. I'd like to have him played in front of us now. Hear the words of the text, the first verse of the Gospel which Mr. Hader read for us today, recorded in the third chapter of Matthew:

> "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. . . "

John really was something else. Peppla really didn't know what to make of him, they had never seen his kind. And wherever he went he put the fear of God into people's hearts. He really shook them up. There was lightning in his eyes, there was thunder in his voice. He kept harping away on one word:

> "Repent! You're a bunch of sinners, that's what you are, and you'd better get squared off with God for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

I don't know when I've preached to you a sermon from beginning to end in a twenty-minute period striking that note of repentance. I said to Winifred as I was finalizing the preparation of this sermon, Why is it these things that are so essential to what we believe, we shy away sometimes from trying to interpret them in a way that people can easily understand? You know, it takes a bit of doing to talk about the fundamental doctrines of the Church. Really now. And even when John the Baptist came talking about repenting, he didn't bother to explain it. He simply struck the note, and did it repeatedly.

During these Sunday mornings in Advent I am talking with you about the Key Words of Advent. Last Sunday morning, you may remember, the key word was "WATCH." Today the key word is "REPENT."

Now let's begin in this manner, with something you yourself may have said

at one time of another, convincingly and repeatedly so - - "You just can't change human nature." You have more than one person who comes readily to mind as Exhibit A to prove your point. You are in a position to recall all the efforts that were made in one way or another to exert upon a particular person a positive and a constructive influence, and no matter what was done, a liar and a thief that person remained. So you came to the conclusion that a leopard just doesn't change his spots. Not that you want it that way, but then that's the way you've known it to be time and again. Small wonder, then, that it's been said so often - - human nature is human nature -- you can't change it.

Having said this, however, let us now turn our thoughts to what I suggest to you is the most fascinating and the hottest aspect, if you please, of contemporary Christianity -- this "born-again" bit. Nothing on the current scene, religiously speaking, is evoking greater attention than this whole business of people having a change of heart.....

> - - listen to the way the preface reads in a recently published best-seller: "Today being born again is big news . . "
>
> -- TIME magazine, back in 1976, carried a feature story on "Born-Again Faith" . . .
>
> -- political candidates give the subject as much attention as the latest economic statistics or the energy crisis....
>
> -- a former Black Panther, a radical of the 1960's, returns from exile and announces, "My life is turned 180° -- I have been born again" . . .
>
> -- a man who was deeply involved in one of the most publicized political scandals of our time -- he writes a best-seller, explaining the change in his life as a result of being born again...
>
> -- a Gaslup Poll comes up with the astonishing conclusion that

in the United States, more than one-third of those who are old enough to vote have experienced born-again religious conversion . . .

-- in the face of all this, Dr. Billy Graham, who has a right to speak, wrote a book entitled, "How To Be Born Again." More than a million copies have been sold. This is what he says: "The expression: 'born again' is not a new term invented by modern journalists to describe recent religious trends. The term 'born again' is about 2,000 years old. One dark night in the ancient city of Jerusalem Jesus turned to one of the best-known intellects of his time and said, 'I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God' . . . "

In those words Jesus told us both the necessity and the possibility of new birth, of spiritual transformation. Since that time untold millions throughout the ages have attested to the reality and the power of God in their lives through being born again. They have been changed! They have had a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of attitude. They have become different people.

Whatever evidence we have to support the idea that human nature can be changed, we cling tenaciously to the contrary. Our Christian faith subscribes wholeheartedly to the concept that man not only can experience a change in heart, but that until he does he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.

I think I have to tell you that I don't think it's a good expression, this "born-again Christian" thing. I don't think it's correct. For you can't be a Christian without being born again. And once you're born again, you become a Christian. It's really as simple as all that.

Now let me tell you what I told you at the beginning -- I'd like very much to have John the Baptist loom on the horizon again, because I think his preaching is the kind of preaching we need to hear today: "Repent! -- Get

squared off with God! -- allow a great and glorious change to take place in your life!" And until it does, you'll never see God as He really is.

I'm inclined to think that for many of us, we've settled in too easily with this whole religious experience of ours. For some of us, the Christian experience is much as our political experiance. We happen to be Republican because that's the way we happen to be by way of our family relationship or the situation in which we found ourselves.....some people happen to be Democrats the same way....and some people pride themselves in not registering with either party, because that's the way their father happened to be.

Some people limp along with their religious experience, pretty much the same, year in and year out, without any pronounced change taking place. Which leads me to ask the question: Have you changed any lately? -- in your thinking about God -- in your thinking about yourself? -- in your thinking about people with whom you must associate? That word repentance from the Greek means: "a change of mind -- a turning around". Now I have to be honest with you, I've wrestled with this quite a bit. I don't know what I ought to tell you this morning about this. Does one have a change in heart and a change in mind because he's dissatisfied with what he's experiencing, and says surely there must be something better and I'll start to look for it....

....is one reaching the place where he becomes so dissatisfied that he says, "Something's got to happen!" .....

....or is it because he knows something is happening that makes him dissatisfied? Is it the weight of his own sin, the weight of his own misery -- or is it the pull of Heaven, is it the goodness of God that triggers all of this?

I'll tell you why I wrestle with this. Take that wonderful story that Jesus told, about the man who had two sons, and the one son was so restless he couldn't stand the old man any more, and he got fed up with what he was experi-

encing at home....and so he says to himself, "I'm going to get away from it -- it's getting to me! I can't stand it!" And so off he goes. Just because he happened to have a father who was wise enough to give him that measure of freedom, and paid a price. The father paid a price - the son surely paid a price.

But you remember how the story goes...there in that far country, after the life had become wasted, the blush of youth had faded from his cheeks, his sex life was spent, he was out of a job, he had no money.....the Bible says, "He came to himself and said, I will go to my father." Well now, does he decide to go home because he's run out of funds, run out of health and run out of friends? Or does he decide to go home because that eternal pull of where he rightfully belongs was always at work upon his soul?

That's where I'd put my money, my friend. Says John the Baptist: "Repent!" But why repent? - - the Kingdom of God is at hand. God is coming toward us -- God's never given up on us. God is always asking us to think in terms of something that's better. God wants to give us Heaven because we weren't meant to go to Hell. That's how wonderful God is. That's why I wish John the Baptist were around, to strike that note again and again and again -- it's come! It's available! It can be ours! But we'll never fully appreciate it until we have turned around and faced it, and desired it - - reach for it.....accept it.

I am grateful for the fact that we belong to a church that sets aside these four weeks before Christmas as a time of getting ready to receive what God wants to give. And in that manner and in that mood I say to you:

— are you fed up with the overpowering influence of hate in your life? - - there can be love, you know.

-- are you fed up with trying to go it on your own, to live your life independent of God? -- you can be God-inspired, you know....you can be God-directed, you know.....

-- are you weary of inching toward Hell? There could be a change, you know....you could be facing Heaven! I think that's what John the Baptist was trying to tell people: "It can be ours - - - but it won't be ours until you make ready, until you turn around, until you face God." This I most certainly believe.

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Sheheen
The Third Sunday in Advent December 11, 1977

KEY WORDS OF ADVENT - "BE PATIENT"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father, and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

James 5:7

This sermon, much to your surprise, perhaps, begins with a personal admission. And here it is without further delay.

Seldom, if ever, have I been reluctant to preach a sermon on a given text. I cannot remember when I have ever gone to the sacred desk except with the driving impulse to say what I felt needed to be said. For this I am profoundly grateful.

The dynamic of such impulse gave me the needed comfort and courage which I dare say are essential for any approximation of effective preaching. I wish it were so today. I stand before you as one not fully qualified to preach on the given text or the theme assigned for today.

Months ago when this schedule of preaching was being arranged, I made the decision that I would speak about some Key Words that belong to the Advent season, inspired by the Lessons which were scheduled for these Sundays during Advent. The Epistle for today, that letter written by James, has the 7th verse of the 5th chapter reading in this manner: "Be patient . . . "

I am not by nature a patient person. The truth of the matter is, I suffer greatly from impatience.....

> -- I am impatient with myself. I have my moments when I recognize that God has given me a measure of talent, and I do not always make the most of what God has given me, and I become terribly annoyed when upon reflection I know that this is absolutely true.....

> -- I have a short fuse, which means on occasion I become impatient with people.....I become impatient with people who are lazy...I don't easily tolerate people who are dishonest....I become infuriated by people who ought to exercise a measure of responsibility which they're meant to exercise, and they fail others miserably by not doing what they ought to do, or perhaps very easily allowing other people to fill the gap and to make up for their inadequacy.....I am not by nature patient with such people.....

And if you'll bear with me -- and it takes a bit of doing on my part to tell you this -- I have my moments when I'm not very patient with God. There are times when I think God ought to act in a far speedier manner than He does, and I can't quite easily understand why He allows some things to happen.

When I turn through the pages of my own life, I learn how again and again and again I have asked God to do some one thing in particular, and He hasn't done it. I believe that He should. And I know that He can. But He hasn't even to this day. Oh, I've learned to trust Him for His infinite wisdom, but, human as I am, I've become impatient with Him.

I remember once in particular . . . she had the face of an angel, and she already had beatific qualities. She was our office secretary in the parish that I first served. At forty years of age it was evident that she was going to become eventually immobilized by arthritis, and crippled as she was, she came day after day to that small office, bent over the typewriter, and in a most awkward way got the typing done.

Impressed by her spiritual sensitivity, impressed by the fact that there was no end to the good that could come from this life if only she were free

from such bondage, I suggested to her that we go to the Little Chapel of the Good Shepherd...That was that name for that quiet corner in God's House in Messiah's Church in South Williamsport ..... and I said to her, "Esther, I'm going to ask God to heal you. I am sure He will." And so we had our service in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd. I prayed as earnestly as I knew how. And as I think of it now, it seems perhaps that I was dictating to God. She wasn't healed.

Physically speaking, her condition worsened -- so much so that she had to be institutionalized. I remember how Winifred and I went to see her in Bethphage Mission in Axtell, Nebraska....and she said, "I can't think of an hour of the day when I'm free from pain, and I'm wracked by it by night."

Many of you are unaware of this, but she was a prayer priest, that's what she was! She never set foot inside this church, but she knew all about us. She read Saint Luke MESSENGER earnestly. There wasn't anything that we engaged in but what she didn't make it a matter of prayer.

Well, maybe in God's infinite wisdom He figured she could serve as a better prayer priest in the face of her affliction than if she were physically whole. I asked God to heal her. He didn't do it on my terms. And I was very impatient with Him.

I wish I could tell you the name of the old-fashioned novel in which the two characters appear, but I can't. I only know that it was one of the two of them who, tried by life's frustrations and failures, turned to the other and asked: 'What does one end by doing when all the best is taken away from a person, when life is growing trivial, stunted, and narrow; when the sum of one's happiness is set?"

The other, thank God, presumably a much older and wiser person, replied: "After a time, not at once -- that would be asking too much of poor human nature -- but after a time, my dear, one lights a candle called Patience, and guides one's footsteps by that . . . "

Have you mastered it yet, my friend? Perhaps the acid test of character is how much you've mastered the art of being patient, not so much with yourself, not so much with other people.....but you've mastered the art of being patient with God.

When I read again what happened in the days of the Old Testament -- how the Children of Israel tried the patience of God just because they had become impatient with Him - - they could never quite understand what He was up to, and why He always insisted on having His own way. Again and again they wanted to try a short-cut, but God remained firm in the decision: "You've got to get there round-about, by way of the wilderness." And who among us hasn't experienced that sojourn in the wilderness, but all of the time we were trying to think of short-cuts.

There is no lesson more urgently needed today than the one that teaches patience. Men in this modern age are everywhere eager to get results, and to get them at the greatest possible speed . . .

-- we fly through the air on wings.....

-- we cross the earth with swift wheels....

-- we travel through the seven seas in record-breaking ships....

-- we're impatient with slow methods of education, which only can yield substantial results.....

-- we insist on cramming the adolescent mind with only those facts which can be turned immediately into practical utility.

-- we're impatient to make money quickly, and I suggest to you that half the sins of the money world with which you and I have to deal, such as profiteering, gambling, and reckless speculation, are directly attributable to our eagerness to secure quick financial results.....

But hear me and hear me well as I say to you, nothing worthwhile, nothing

that lasts and permanently enriches human life is done in a hurry.

And that's why God, who deals in eternity, is forever asking us to learn to be patient. And when He gives us an obstacle course, the obstacle course is ours to run because in His judgment, the big thing about us is the kind of person we become as we live out the days of our years. And the acid test of life is in the kind of character that you produce, and patience is the way of learning to trust God. And as we become patient we develop the kind of character that's acceptable in His sight.

I remember seeing the old codger....he was a precious black man, I presume of plantation stock. He sat alongside of me on that bench in one of those plantation gardens in Alabama a number of years ago. And as you might presume, I engaged him in conversation. And I'm numbered among those who honestly believe that if you talk with a person long enough you eventually get around to the subject of God. And we did. And he gave me his own precious philosophy.....out of his years he said to me, "I've learned to trust Him. It hasn't always been easy. But I can tell you this, brother -- He has His own schedule. He won't always come when you call on Him. But He's always on time, and He's never late!" I plead with you to believe that about God, in your life.

I say this to you as strongly as I can because I've reached the point where, when I assess Judas Iscariot, I think that was the besetting sin of Judas Iscariot -- not that he carried the money, I don't buy that one. But I think Judas Iscariot did what he did because he became impatient with Jesus Christ. He couldn't wait for Jesus Christ to accomplish the way Jesus Christ knew the thing had to be accomplished. And so he tried to force the hand of Jesus Christ, to put Him into a position where He would have to declare then and there His Kingdom, to call down from Heaven the mighty host that would put the Roman Empire to the march.

But that wasn't God's plan. And you can never force the hand of God. And you can't make God jump through the hoops just because you think He should.

I plead with you as earnestly as I can to be patient with God. Because in the final analysis, honestly now, that's the thing we want most from God! And if you and I could only remember it, since we want God to deal patiently with us, maybe we'll learn to deal patiently with other people.

I must read it for you now. It's Coventry Patmore's lines . . .

" . . My little son, who looked from thoughtful eyes
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
Having my Law the seventh time disobeyed.
I struck him, and dismissed
With hard words and unkissed,
— His mother, who was patient, being dead.
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed.
But found him slumbering deep,
With darkened eyelids, and their lashes yet
From his late sobbing wet.
And, I, with moan
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-veined stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells
A bottle with blue bells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there
with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.

So when that night I prayed
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last I lie with
tranced breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou remembrast of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded
from the clay,
Thou wilt leave Thy wrath, and say,
"I will be sorry for their
childishness . . . "

(Transcribed as recorded)

...and with that thought I turn my back and walk away fr
this sacred desk . . . .

KEY WORDS OF ADVENT - "EMMANUEL"

Matthew 1:23

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

If it's a warning that you'll be needing, let me give it to you now, for I frankly admit that what you're going to hear in these introductory statements to this sermon you will not find in Scripture. Oh, there's a text for the sermon, of course there is, and the text, as has been our custom during this Advent-tide, is based upon one of the Lessons for the Day. Today it's the 23rd verse of the 1st chapter of Matthew:

"They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted, is God with us."

Now, these prefatory remarks that you'll not find in Scripture.

You're being called upon now to exercise a sanctified imagination, and I'm going to suggest to you that you call this imaginary character Joshua ben Israel. He was the prosperous farmer who lived on the edge of town which was called Nazareth. He had progressed so well that he decided to build for himself, in his latter years, a very resplendent house. And he made up his mind that he would have the finest craftsmanship in that house that would be possible. And that's why he was led to a carpenter's shop in Nazareth that was owned by a man named Joseph.

And when he came to Joseph he said, "Your reputation has preceded you and I've seen some of your work. Now with what money that I can afford to spend on this house, one of the finest investments that I have yet to make in my life, I'd like to have some of your quality workmanship. I want you to design and to make for me a very special threshold.....I want you to design and make for me the staircase that will lead on the outside of the house to the roof-top where

we will recline on warm summer nights....."

". . . . and then, Joseph, I have one more thing I want you to make for me -- a very special table. We won't have much furniture, but what we have I want to be very fine....." Joseph took the order and was pleased, and assured him that he would give him the best possible workmanship.

They arranged upon a schedule of delivery. The time came to deliver the first item, the material for the doorway. Joshua ben Israel remarked to his wife: "My lands, that man seems happy! I can hear him whistling as he headed our way even before he came to the place where we were standing...and I detected in his eyes a light, and I dare say a glow in his soul that wasn't there when I went to his carpenter's shop. Something happened to that man!" ....Joshua ben Israel said to his wife.

Now what Joshua ben Israel did not know, and what Joseph did not tell, was the fact that he had become engaged. Now tradition has it that Joseph was a man up in years, up in years to the extent, perhaps, he was 20 - 25 years older than the girl he was going to marry. It made him happy, of course, to know that the prospect of marriage could be his, and that the marriage would mean, as it was meant to mean, a family.....and that among the children that she would bear him would be a son or two to carry on his business.....

-- no wonder Joshua ben Israel saw in Joseph something he had not seen before. For even though the engagement had been arranged for them, neither the bride nor the groom was displeased.

The time came for the second item to be delivered, and the third. And this time there was a difference in the man named Joseph. And

Joshua ben Israel was somewhat troubled. He hardly spoke, and when he was paid he took his money and barely said 'thank you.' He had a far-away look in his eyes, the look that comes into a man's face when his soul has seen something indescribable - - and if he were to recount it to somebody, the person who would hear it would say it's unbelievable. He was a different Joseph.....

....and Joshua ben Israel had reason to believe that when he looked at the quality of the workmanship, that it was the workmanship of a man who seemed to have been preoccupied while he was doing the work.....

He didn't say anything about it, nor did Joshua ben Israel probe. He had too high a regard for Joseph. And Joseph went away.

Joshua ben Israel was absolutely right - - Joseph was a different man. What he didn't tell Joshua ben Israel was this: that the girl to whom he had been engaged three months earlier had been away for three months now, visiting her cousin Elizabeth, and when she came back she told Joseph "I'm pregnant - - I am with child."

Joseph, a good and honorable man, found it extremely difficult to cope with this. His immediate reaction would have been your reaction, and naturally so. It wasn't his child.

Being a just and honorable man, he thought he'd do the decent thing by her and make some kind of an arrangement where she could be put aside. How they'd do that he wasn't quite certain, but at least he wouldn't censor her, and he wouldn't try to find excuses. But they'd both get out of it as honorably as they could - - - honestly now, you can read it that way! You heard the bold way that it was put in the Gospel lesson that Col. Clemans read for us.

Then while Joseph was trying to figure this thing out in his mind, God

speaks to him -- just as He had spoken to Mary -- and God gives him to understand that this is true, and the truth is such that it shatters the imagination of a man's mind.

The writer of the record, Matthew by name, when he reflects upon this, isn't satisfied to say the baby will be called Jesus. But he also says, " . . his name Emmanuel, which means God with us."

...now, that's why Joseph walked away as he did from Joshua be Israel - - he was wrestling with this idea that God was going to come -- God was going to be very near to them -- that God was going to use them as instruments in His hand. It takes a bit of doing to get used to the idea that God could do something that doesn't make sense to us.

It always takes a bit of doing for us to accept the fact that God's wisdom is greater than ours. It always takes a bit of doing on our part to finally accept the fact that God will do something. Strange, isn't it -- we're the ones who are always asking God to do something, and Joseph was numbered among those who in his day kept asking God: "Why don't you rend the heavens!" -- as the prophet had cried out -- "and visit your earth - - why don't you come as Ezekial prophesied, that 'Behold, I, even I, says the Lord, will come to my people' . . . " Joseph was numbered among those who thought in those terms, and to believe that one day God would come. And now it takes a bit of doing on his part to accept the fact that that's exactly what God had chosen to do! So Joshua ben Israel found on his hands a man named Joseph with a look in his eye, the look of a man who had experienced something that's absolutely indescribable, and once he were to relate it to another man, that person would find it unbelievable.

Wisely the church includes in its calendar, it seems to me, these four Sundays in Advent, to get us ready for the very thought of Christmas itself, because Christmas is God's idea! It takes a bit of doing on our part to get

accustomed to the idea that God himself will come to us, and be near us, and dwell with us -- identify with us.

Odd, isn't it -- odd indeed, most any man is willing to accept the idea of a God removed from this world, or a God detached from His world. You know what, don't you? -- you and I really don't have much trouble with the God-of-Abraham and the God-of-Isaac and the God-of-Jacob. We can read the Old Testament -- that was the God who was, the God who acted then and there. We can accept that. But for a God to become one of us! For a God -- and please allow me to use the expression, crass as it may seem -- for a God to get messed up with us! How else can you explain that identification which was so complete that we laid hands upon that God, spit in His face, and killed Him? It takes a bit of doing to adjust to an idea like that -- a God who would come to us.

But the God in whom we believe as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of love, and love is always reaching out for its own. Love will always complete its rendevous with those whom it loves. And so God comes to us. And what God asks from us in return is the willingness to believe and to respond. And as he accepts us as we are, He asks in turn that we accept Him as He is, a God who stoops to our level. For that's the only kind of a God who can save us.

Tell me, now -- what is the miracle-of-miracles? Please don't begin and end by simply saying: the miracle is the fact of God Himself. Putting it that way just isn't enough. The miracle-of-miracles lies in the kind of God that we know Him to be: He is God-come-to-us -- and that's really something! It is ever so much more than a God-far-away or a God-detached-from-His-world: no matter how great, good or majestic He may be in His absenteeism. It takes a bit-of-doing for God to get so close to us as to get 'messed up' with us. But then that's the kind of a God that we have . . . and that's why we love Him.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Christmas Eve - 8:00 p.m. December 24, 1977

"SURPRISE!"

John 1:14

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

God isn't given much to shouting, but I presume if one were to think of God as shouting, the word that He might shout more often than any other word could be "Surprise!" For Christmas, I suggest to you tonight, is God's shouting to the world: "Surprise! Surprise!" For Christmas really is one surprise after another.

That's the way it was then, and I dare say that's the way it may be for you tonight, because when you go to sleep in all likelihood you may be thinking about the people that you want to surprise tomorrow morning - - when they reach for their presents under the tree. And isn't that one reason that you wrap them the way you do? — not just to make them attractive, but that you might keep that element of surprise until the last wrapping has been taken away. When you think of that first Christmas, let me tell you again, it's really as the company of the surprised. For no matter which one you may name, in all likelihood you'll find a surprised look on that person's face.

Begin with Mary, if you will.....imagine how surprised she was! — when God put His finger upon her and said, "Mary, of all the people on the face of the earth, you're the one! You will cradle in your arms my Beloved Son! You will sing Him to sleep at night....you will bathe Him....you will feed Him.....you will guide Him.....you will be as My arms, you will love Him for Me. Mary, you're the one!" Surprised, of course, and as long as there will be a Christendom, whenever they sing the song of Mary, it's the song of a woman surprised by great joy....

Take Joseph.....what a surprised look he carried on his face. He knew he

loved Mary. But he never knew how much that love was meant to be till God revealed to him the responsibility that he was to shoulder - - for one day there would be standing by his side that olive-skinned, dark-haired, dark-eyed youngster, standing ankle-deep in shavings, watching Joseph in the carpenter's shop.....learning from him so many precious things. Joseph, you have a surprised look on your face, don't you? You are the one. Of all the people on the face of the earth none can fulfill your role except you! Who -- me?.....presumably that's the way Joseph responded.....

Christmas is the Company-of-the-surprised.....!

Shepherds.....rough and rugged men, who seldom if ever, because of their job, got to church. Who thought of them as those to whom holy things would be revealed? And yet there in the field, one night, they not only saw an angel! but they heard a bunch of angels sing. Surprise! -- that's right. God was shouting surprise in their very faces --"you are the ones! you're meant to hear the angels sing!"

Wise men.....learned, astute, sophisticated. They leave their books, they leave their ivory towers, they take a couple years of their lives, and they wander...and wander, guided by an irresistable star. And then they end up in a dirty stable, with a crying baby! God shouts "Surprise!" -- "This is the way it ends!"

Think of Christmas and all who are involved, it's the Company-of-the-surprised, I tell you.....

Herod, the wicked king - - - don't tell me, says Herod, with that surprised look on his face -- "Where's my CIA? -- where's my intelligence corps? Is it a couple of foreigners, lately arrived in Jerusalem, who tell me that one is being born to be a Jewish king? " Surprise! - God's way of shouting surprise in the face of a wicked king Herod.

And would you believe me when I tell you that that inn-keeper got a surprised look on his face after a while. The word was chosen carefully -- "after a while" - - I'm willing to believe that he knew nothing at all about what was happening in the stable. He was too busy making a quick dollar that night. And if somebody came and told him a fanciful tale about shepherds who heard angels when he catered to his trade, he had many a patron who stayed too long with the cups and would spin an idle tale.....and as far as some poor people stopping by the door! - - he'd seen many a poor person in his day, and he and his kind would say, "You see one poor man, you've seen them all!" So chances are the inn-keeper knew nothing about what was happening that night. But after a while he got the surprised look.....and I dare say, only after he died. For this is one of the elements of Judgment - - - on the other side of Death, it could be that the trauma--traumas is to have all of our life played back in front of us, and then to see it as it was! -- not as we thought it to be, but the reality of it all .....and then the inn-keeper for the first time gets a surprised look on his face to realize it was happening there within reach! -- and he didn't know it. He missed his chance.

...who was it who said, "Hell is the truth, found out too late" . . .

God perhaps seldom shouts, but if He does, I'm willing to believe the word that comes quickest to his lips again and again is "Surprise! Surprise! Surprise!" God's always dealing in surprises. Small wonder, we don't know His mind, we can't match His wisdom, and whatever He sees fit to do may be far beyond our ken, our knowledge, or even our will.

There's a text for this brief meditation tonight. I didn't read it for you at the very beginning, honestly I didn't, and I'll tell you why. You might have turned me off if I would have announced that text for this sermon on this holy ... Let me read it for you now, the 14th verse of the 1st chapter of the Gospel according to John: "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us . . "

It's not your favorite Christmas text, I know it isn't. You'd much rather have me choose the text that touches upon angels, and their singing....about wise men and the star.....about the magi, and the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. You'd much rather have me deal with a text that tells about Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger - - these we can romanticize so easily, honestly we can. But I suggest tonight with all the strength I can command, these are the incidentals of Christmas. These, and I say it advisedly, are the trappings of Christmas. They're not the real stuff.

Who was it who told me about the parents of their pride and joy who chose very carefully what they thought was a gift that he would like, only to discover that when he got it out of the box, he spent all of his time playing with the box! He was fascinated by it. I warn you, my friends, don't become too fascinated by a star, about angels and their singing, about wise men and their trek -- these are the incidentals. John is right when he comes to the very core of the matter and he says "The word became flesh and dwelt among us" - - this is the meaning of Christmas! -- this is God's great surprise: "I myself will come to you, and I'll come to you in the form of a human being."

.....a free and reckless translation of that sublime text is:

" . . . and God became a human being - - and God became like one of us . . . "

Surprise, isn't it? To think that God would stoop to our level! It's much easier to think of a God high and exalted, majestic and glorious. But to think of a God who would come and traffick in this world and get 'messed up' with it! But God surprised us that night by doing it that way. Because we couldn't possibly understand that that's the only way it could be! For God wanted us to understand that in that surprise package (and I say it with the utmost of reverence) -- in that surprise package which was Jesus Christ, He shows us what man was meant to be. Ours is a wicked world, of course it is. But it's a world, from God's point of

view, that wasn't meant to go to Hell. From God's point of view, we weren't meant to be the Company-of-Satan. From God's point of view we were meant to be a company of angels. And so to prove the point God surprises us by becoming one of us and showing us how it can be done. He takes on human form. He becomes Love incarnate.

Why is a man truthful? Not because he's in love with truth, but because he's met a person who was truthful.

Why does a person respect love? Because he's either been the recipient of love, or he's been related to someone who is pure love.

So God, who doesn't delight in dealing with abstracts, deals in flesh and blood, and gives us Exhibit A, and says, "Let me surprise you, and I'll show you that it can be done!" And so He gave us Jesus Christ - - turned Him loose in this wicked world. The world has never been the same since. And that's why to the day you and I die we'll say "Love is stronger than Hate - - and Life is greater than Death!"

I thank God that I've never allowed myself to get to the place where I'm not on the verge of being surprised by something that God's about to do. And that's why I keep myself sensitive to the way God might see fit to surprise some of us here. And that's why as I conclude this sermon I want to tell you about one of God's noblemen who was a member of this parish, known to few of you, however. He used to sit, Bill Einwaechter, where you're sitting, about the third seat, fourth seat from the front. He was 90 years of age. I used to say to him, "Arnold Peter Jorgensen!" - - and he'd say, "Himself, in person!" And that's exactly what he was, every bit that God meant him to be, with the stamp of the divine clearly evidenced.

Now listen to this. He kept himself busy, even when he reached the sunset slope of life. He was an accountant, and downtown he went to a certain restaurant

and he found himself being drawn to a table where a man was sitting, and he ate lunch with him....and he did that again and again and again. It went from a week to a month, and so on. And one day that man didn't show up. He confided in me, and he said, "I never knew the man's name, but I enjoyed talking with him and paying attention to him, and he paid attention to me." But then that day came when he didn't show up. And Arnold Peter Jorgensen found himself with that strange assignment, looking for that man whose name he didn't know. But as God would guide a man who's nobly intentioned, he found out the man's name. Then he also found out that the man had died in his room, and they'd taken his body away to the city morgue.

Arnold Peter Jorgensen went to the morgue and identified that body, and then he also found out that the relatives in another state refused to claim that body. Arnold Peter Jorgensen made arrangements with the local undertaker. He purchased a plot out of his own money in a cemetery...he arranged for a preacher to come and say a few words, and he gave him a decent Christian burial.....

Surprise! --- you didn't think that kind of thing happened in this wicked world any more, did you? You didn't think that kind of thing could happen in this impersonal life which is the metropolitan area?

Surprise! God is still alive! God is still at work. And because He's alive, our world will be studded with surprises. It is possible to be God-like, and Jesus Christ proves the point.

" . . . and the word became flesh . . . " Surprise! He <u>lived</u> right here!

....this I most certainly believe.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)